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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Engendering Blackness: Gender, Sexual Violence, and the Tales of Slavery

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Culture and Theory

by

PATRICE DIANNA DOUGLASS

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Jared C. Sexton, Chair
Professor Frank B. Wilderson, III
Professor Sora Y. Han

2016

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DEDICATION

To Lathan

Know there are no limits to your power, no bounds to your imagination, and no potential you cannot reach. Always stay true to yourself and always reach for your dreams.

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The words that coalesce on the subsequent pages are supported by many relationships that suture this project in invaluable ways. This is the second iteration of my graduate work. The support I received from my dissertation committee chair and advisor Professor Jared Sexton, to reevaluate and commit to a graduate career at the University of California, Irvine, after having begun a tenure elsewhere, is a commitment I could never repay. After emailing Professor Sexton in the fall of 2008, long before I became his student or a graduate student in any capacity, he imparted me with an unwavering support to think freely and move freely within the academy. He has written countless letters of recommendation, and vouched for me as an intellectual on many fronts. I am indebted to his belief that my critical perspectives and viewpoints from which I theorize the world are valid and should be heard. He has never once attempted to silence me but has gently, without any sense of forcefulness, led me to explore and take on new ventures of thought. My thanks to him for allowing me to be me wholly and completely in intellectualism is ever abundant and infinite.

The generosity of Professor Frank B. Wilderson, III gifted me long before we met. A friend emailed me a host of articles by Professor Wilderson, noting that some of the things I had said about my desired course of study mirrored the lines of thought present in his work. Upon reading his articles, I for once felt that there was a place for me, as a far left thinking activist, coming into academia. His indebtedness to write from the hold of ship has undoubtedly allowed me to wallow in the contradictions of Blackness without apologizing for my instance on doing so. Quite honestly I was initially afraid to meet Professor Wilderson. In text he appeared too intellectually magnanimous for my developing mind. My fears proved unmerited as Professor Wilderson generously lent his support to me before I formally became his student. There are no words to express how grateful I am for the mentorship Professor Wilderson has bestowed upon me. The careful and intentional manner he maneuvers to be true and honest in his choice of words, has guided me to craft and hone the explanatory weight of my narrative strategies. Professor Wilderson believed in me first as a politico before making any assertions about what my intellectual labor had the potential to be as an academic. This recognition has proven to be invaluable. As a mentor he has guided me on my own terms rather than forcing an inscription onto me based on strictures from the academy. I am truly grateful that he recognized promise in me as an intellectual and has extended himself beyond the parameters of the call of his title to ensure that I also recognize and hone the strength of my potentials. Through his offering me research and lecturing opportunities, I have developed invaluable networks that will continue to grow beyond the scope of this project. I thank Professor Wilderson for more than I have the space here to say. I thank him for being friendly in an environment that has proven itself infinitely hostile. Most of all I thank Professor Wilderson for his intellectual labors and for never failing to make a space in the hold so that others might have the chance to breathe.

I cannot offer enough thanks to Professor Sora Han for supporting my project through my insistence on laboring in solitude. I also thank her for always treating me with the respect of a colleague. It may seem like an insignificant gesture however as I began my coursework at the University of California, Irvine unsure of my place within academia, the recognition of my capacity to offer intellectual contributions worth respecting proved helpful beyond measure. It was the gift I needed to accept that this project and my continued pursuits were warranted.

I offer tremendous gratitude to Professor Sabine Broeck for supporting me from aboard and offering countless opportunities for me to share my work. After a brief meeting and a generative intellectual conversation on the foundations of epistemology and ontology with regards to Blackness, Professor Broeck and I developed a growing intellectual relationship. Over the years, Professor Broeck has been unwavering in her support of my project and my growth as a scholar. I am thankful and grateful for the excitement she has always shown for my developing project. Her enthusiasm has helped me see beyond the page to the potentials of my scholarship in a broader global conversation on Blackness.

My original cohort-mate Joshua Mitchell, we may have started more as unspoken rivals but our friendship has lasted long beyond that place in time. Your support has meant so much to me throughout this journey. I am glad we both decided to stay the course. Thank you for being one of my first and lasting supporters through all the shifts and turns. I am grateful to you for always listening and hearing the truth of my speech.

To my intellectual interlocutors at UCI and beyond, Nicholas Brady, Cecilio Cooper, Darol Kaye, Jasmine Montgomery, John Murillo III, Omar Ricks, Jaye Austin Williams, you all are brilliant beyond measure and I have been so grateful to learn from and with you. I thank each of you, for helping the trees of thought continue to grow in my mind. Most of all thank you for offering the space of recognition to know that although we all struggle, what we have to say about the world is worthy of being heard.

To my Black feminist mama in struggle, Lydia Kelow-Bennett, I am so glad we had the off chance to meet on that fall day in Fairfax, Virginia of all places. Though our meeting was not by chance but by design so that we might provide one another support during those times when "this" has felt unbearable. Thank you for theorizing, struggling, chatting with me about all things Black feminist and bold. Thank you for being so close even as we have labored this journey at a physical distance.

Kenneth Leblue your personal and intellectual friendship has been my guiding light to keep the everyday lives of Black people central to my work. Your words and insights have been infinitely fruitful to my abilities to keep what matters most in focus. Your friendship has kept me alive while surrounded by the staunch nature of theory. You have helped me see that there is more to life than theory and that theory is life. Your brilliance is beyond measure.

Thank you to my partner in life, Leo, for always believing in my strengths especially when I struggled to see them for myself. You have shown me unwavering support thought this journey, even as it has at time been unclear what the destination might be and where it may lead. Without your trusting support this project could not be. Thank you for always listening and being willing to offer guidance from the outside looking in. You have been my steadfast foundation through this all for which I could never repay.

Finally, thank you to my parents, Michael and Barbara Douglass, for guiding me to think critically about the world around me. It is from their original teachings that the life of this project grows.

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PUBLICATIONS

Chapters in Edited Collections

Douglass, P. and Wilderson, III. F. B. The Violence of Presence: Metaphysics in a Blackened World. George Yancy (ed.) *The Black Scholar* 43, no. 4 (2013): 117-23.

"From the Intersections of Assemblages: Fanon, Capecia, and the Unmaking of the Genre Subject." *Conceptual Aphasia: Displacing Racial Formation Theory* Eds. Tryon P. Woods and Khalil Saucer. (Lexington Press, forthcoming 2016).

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Papers Presented

May 2016 Paper, "Examining Social Violence and Claims of Political Right through *Kindred*," presented at the "German Association of American Studies Annual Meeting," University of Osnabrück, Germany

April 2014 Paper, "The Claim of Right to Property: Social Violence and Political Right," presented at the "Futures of Black Studies: Historicity, Objectives and Methodologies, Ethics" Conference, University of Bremen, Germany

March 2013 Paper, "Subjects of Theory: Gender and Objective Determination," presented at the 10th International Conference of the Collegium for African American Research (CAAR), Agnes Scott College, Atlanta, GA

April 2011 Paper, "Spatial Longings: Black Desire and the Structures of Recognition," presented at the 9th International Conference of the Collegium for African American Research (CAAR), Université Paris Diderot-Paris 7, Paris, France

March 2011 Paper, "Blackness as Contention: Ethnic Studies, Anti-Blackness, and the Politics of Incorporation," presented at Critical Ethnic Studies Conference, University of California, Riverside

Sep. 2010 Paper, "The Personal is Not Individual: Feminist Liberation, Autobiography, and the Politics of Collectivity," presented at Africana Women Conference, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA

March 2010 Paper, "In the Shadows of Oscar Grant: Community Responses to Police Violence," presented at Mellon sponsored "Decolonization Studies: Culture, Social Movements, Governance" Workshop, University of California, Riverside

Feb. 2010 Paper, "The Struggle for Prison Industrial Complex Abolition: Complicating Multicultural Coalition Politics," presented at The National Council for Black Studies Conference, New Orleans, LA

Sep. 2009 Paper, "In a Post-Racial Society: Blackness and the Prisoner Subjectivity," presented at African Identities in the Age of Obama, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA

Moderator

May 2012 Moderator, "Reproductive Rights and Child Welfare" panel, at Race & Gender | State & Capital: A Symposium on the work of Dorothy Roberts, University of California, Irvine

Roundtable Discussions

Nov. 2010 Roundtable, "Teaching Abolition and the Prison Industrial Complex," presentation at Crisis, Chains, and Change: American Studies for the 21st Century, American Studies Association Annual Meeting, San Antonio, TX

Nov. 2010 Roundtable, "Strength in Our Differences: A Roundtable on Potential for Radical Alliances in the African Diaspora," presentation at Difficult Dialogues II, Annual National Women Studies Association Conference, Denver, CO

March 2008 Roundtable, California Prison Culture, Art, Issues and Dialogue Symposium, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA

INVIDED TALKS

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Engendering Blackness: Gender, Sexual Violence, and the Tales of Slavery

By

Patrice Dianna Douglass

Doctor of Philosophy in Culture and Theory

University of California, Irvine, 2016

Professor Jared C. Sexton, Chair

This dissertation project interrogates the mundane and pervasive practice of sexual violence under slavery at the level of ontological relations, as a mechanism of deracinating violence that produces Blackness in a contradictory relation with the political and social renderings of gender and sexuality. It holds sexual violence through history and political allegory as *the* essential violence of slavery. The concern woven throughout this project is with the incapacity of political theory proper to mediate on the contexts of sexual violation as a centralizing and absolute force wagered against the formulation of Black gendered subjectivity. Thus I argue that sexual violence places Blackness within a double exposure, marking the body as open to gratuitous violence and also subsequently culpable for the violence it endures. While the experience of sexualized violence under slavery provides purview to this project, my engagement with the term attempts to broaden its scope to reveal how its logics condition the full exposure of blackness to varying arrays of violence.

Using literary works from Octavia Butler, Toni Cade Bambara, Gayl Jones, and Toni Morrison in a cross historical conversation with legal histories of slavery, I argue Black women's writing and Black feminist thought provide a space to begin imagining the political and social implications of slavery as an institution built on sexual violence, in a manner in which the law denies through the crowding out of slave injury in the historical record. As such I content that sexual

violence reaches beyond the slave quarters, and the plantation, appearing in everything that is present or absent in the potentials of the world. Thus this project demonstrates how political identifications are authorized through the structural barring of Blackness to articulate through difference. Furthermore, this project maintains that the engendering of Blackness holds Black gender as recognition for the captor.

Introduction: Coalitions Amiss: Theorizing Gender in Black

> …we were supposed to pass it down like that from generation to generation so we'd never forget. Even though they'd burned everything to pieces like it didn't never happen. Yeah, and where's the next generation?
>
> – Gayl Jones, *Corregidora*

> A female body strung from a tree limb, or bleeding from the breast on any given day of field work because the "overseer"' standing the length of a whip, has popped her flesh open, adds a lexical and living dimension to the narratives of women in culture and society. This materialized scene of unprotected female flesh- of female flesh "ungendered" – offers a praxis and a theory, a text for living and for dying, and a method for both reading through their diverse mediations.
>
> – Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book"

What does it mean to suffer as a Black woman? Is it a structured possibility to approach the term Black woman as a whole configuration? Or does such an inquiry require a maneuver that might lead to another set of questions entirely that trouble and unhinge Black gender as a position that can ever be without contestation? *Engendering Blackness* is animated by this set of questions and the endless introspections that emerge thereafter, when Black and gender are placed in critical tension. The limitless violence that situates Blackness, as a structural category in the world, reorients the orbit of the very terms used to inaugurate a discourse on suffering. Forcing instead the conceptual framework of what it means to *be* in the first instance of violence to grapple with suffering at the level of unethical arrangements of power. If gender is being in suffering and Blackness is the domain of nonbeing, then what is there to make of Black gender as something that cannot be disarticulated? What is put forth is a calculation upon which Black gender functions as the subtext for the emancipatory terms of gender freedoms for nonblack beings. As such, the orientation of Black gender and the violent arrangements that produce it become buried by competing and decisive gender terms and expressions that maintain that the conditions of gender violence operate within a particular spectrum of relations that Blackness is stridently placed in opposition to. Thus Black gender becomes the place from which gender, as a broadly encapsulated reference, marks its identity

against as gendered subjects announce their presence in the world as a challenge to and critique of Black feminist labors that mark Black gender as a singularity.

A few years ago, a friend passed along a flyer for a symposium being held at the UCLA School of Law, entitled "Overpoliced and Underprotected: Women, Race, and Criminalization." The panel arrangements including many leading Black feminist theorists who have been instrumental in pushing and institutionalizing critical theorizations of violence against Black women. These critical theorists have works that have circulated widely within academia and political organizing spaces, creating the language upon which people use to talk about suffering, not only with respect to Black women, but across various subject positions. My friend, like I, and several other Black graduate students were longing for a sustained conversation on the prevailing predominance of Black specific violence that did not codify the realities of these phenomena into a language of multiculturalism that mollified and decentered what in fact was Black about the nature of this violence. We all hoped this engagement would be carried out without overwhelming hostility from co-panelists, moderators, and the audience, as we had observed many time over at conferences when Blackness is the topic of discussion. Our assumptions were wrong. In fact, it was revealed that many of these prominent Black female scholars were well aware that their research on Black gender violence posed a problem for thought, as a few of them asked the organizers in advance "is it okay to talk about Black women?" Everyone laughed when the organizer jokingly highlighted this concern, but what exactly was laughable and why does speaking about Blackness, gender, and violence in exclusivity muster such a response of anger and angst?

Answering the later requires nothing short of a grand exegesis. The angle this project takes in order to grapple with what is unspoken and underexplored about the relationship between Blackness, gender, and violence employs this following statement as fact; the violence of slavery is in essence irreconcilable. The grandiose nature of its paradigmatic shift in the structure of being,

existence, and space and time, produced through centuries of the theft and enslavement of Black bodies, structured two colliding realms of thoughts. One that wishes slavery would simply disappear from discourse and rhetoric to clear the way for "other" pressing political issues. And another position that is painfully aware that slavery cannot and will not disappear as an urgent matter of political concern as long as the world exist the way it is presently known. Theorizing with respect to the latter, *Engendering Blackness* interrogates sexual violence as *the* essential violence of slavery. I contend that sexual violence as a mundane and pervasive practice under slavery was not solely nor primarily a mechanism of reproductive violence for the purposes of producing a labor force. Such an insistence is reductive to the scope and engagement of sexual violence, relegating it to a position of visible force, when in fact I argue the implications are structured into invisibility. The question, what is to be done for the sexually violated slave, is devoid of an answer. This impossibility is ontological rather than epistemological. The sexually violable Black awaits its verb.[1] Sexual violence situates the merger of the experiential and theoretical, as both the performance of violence and the conceptual frameworks to articulate the gravity of violation are silent. Are there any definitive terms that can emerge a Black grammar of suffering that attends to the viscous history of sexual violence? Furthermore, how does gender collide with Blackness so that the articulation of offense is imprisoned by identifying terms that are predicated on objectifying silences? Can the Black emerge through gender? The simple answer is no. The paradigmatic underpinnings of intelligibility are catalyzed by the absolute submission of the Black to the gratuitous openness inherent in possessiveness of the sexual encounter.

Given the pretexts posed above, it is futile to refuse silence as self-evident. There is much to be said about what cannot be spoken about Blackness, gender, and sexual violence. The return to slavery is a paradigmatic necessity to expose the gapping strictures of Black gendered impossibilities.

[1] See Hortense J. Spillers, "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words," *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003).

The critical work of Black feminists makes this scope of engagement possible. Working within the genealogy of critical Black feminist thought, I am tasked to hold an unwavering mediation on sexual violence as the central power of slavery rather than a peripheral experience. Not in the sense that this theoretical labor has not been previously performed. Instead it is with respect to the revelations of the many Black feminist texts that attest that the inquisitions into arrangements of gender and sexual power are not and cannot be conclusive. The refraction of the violence is too vast and the historical record is painful convoluted. Given this fact the imaginary register offers a site for theory. As Audre Lorde asserts, "We have the stories of Black women who healed each other's wounds, raised each other's children, fought each other's battle, tilled each other's earth, and eased each other's passages into life and into death… We have a growing Black women's literature which is richly evocative of these possibilities and connections."[2] Literary works of Black women writers provide an imaginary dynamism when authoring political visions of slavery. Literature offers a poetic space where history and theory can converge, so that the impossible might be spoken of and political desires attended to.

Engendering Blackness employs twentieth-century Black women's literature as a critical tool for thought. Black women's writing opens up a conduit for grasping how present desires shape returns to slavery. Using works from Toni Cade Bambara, Octavia Butler, Gayl Jones, and Toni Morrison, this project interrogates the perceptive value of thinking sexual violence as the first instance of violence for the slave. These Black novelists use Black women as sites of memory marking their positions in the world as precarious and saturated with the visuality of externally imposed discursive scripts. What they demonstrate are narratives that refuse to foreclose Blackness to a preconstituted relationship with structures of violence. These authors unhinge the strident belief that slavery can be named in all its iterations. Instead they offer calculi of violence that emerge from sexual openness

[2] Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*, (New York: Crossing Press, 2007), 152-3.

that make conclusive claims to injury impossible. They push the reader to imagine through impossibility and structured invisibility to mediate on the refractions of Black subjugation. Furthermore, by writing images of slavery during and following the repressive shift against radicalism in the mid-twentieth century, these writers offer slavery as a historical allegory to the status of Blackness in the here and now. These stories are as much about the past as they are about the present.

The counterpoint of analysis this project uses to think the vexing relationship between the slave and injury is the historical legal record. Using case law that alludes to incidents of sexual violence against slaves, both female and male, the concern here is with how the law imagines and grants subjectivity to other beings as it structurally bars the adjudication of wrongdoing against slaves. Furthermore, even in the righteous attempts of some to vouch for the injurious positionality of slaves before the law, repeatedly the law frames rights and claims to the recognition in manner that marks Blackness as possessing no ontological resistance to sexual violence. The sexual violation of slaves before the law is a putrid rendering. Nothing is said yet much is done to the benefit of the production of Human categories. Dispossession before the law is a structured permanence for Blackness, so that even restitution is coded with the assumptive logic that the injury of the slave is the possessed injury of another. The slave is casted into a space where its harm provides purview for the coming into existence of various subjectivities. The starkness of the legal history of slavery highlights the necessity to think the permanence of exclusion and susceptibilities to sexual violence through the imaginative registers of critical literary works. The coming together of the imaginative labors of Black women's writing and the imaginative power wielded by the law, bring into critical view the invocations of the gendering of Blackness. As Hortense Spillers proclaims, "…claiming the monstrosity (of a female with the potential to 'name'), which her culture imposes in blindness,

'Sapphire' might rewrite after all a radically different text for female empowerment."[3] What this project will demonstrate throughout is the power of naming and the ways in which the engendering of Blackness skews perceptions of where and how violence is thought to align terms of association.

During the UCLA symposium, as panelists presented papers and statistical data on Black women and girls inhabiting an overrepresentation within multiple systems including, state policing apparatuses, incarceration, evictions, housing exclusion, and foster care to name a few of the many instances upon which this conference illustrated a deadening relationship between Black women and spaces of state authorized and socially maintained violence. Yet one audience member took issue with these presentations. Not for what they presented about the grave conditions of Black female life, but with the assumption that such papers and data erased and ignored the subject populations of her concern, Brown women. She stood to ask if the panelists could talk about issues effecting Brown women and implied that enough had been said about Black women and girls that it seemed time to move on. Granted, no conclusions were drawn about what to do with the gravity of Black gender demonstrated in these presentations, yet there was an urge to move on and to leave what was said unattended, not with a desire to return but to bury and ignore suggesting a denied importance of what was revealed. The assumption was predicated on the belief that to speak about Black women and girls requires that it must not be done in singularity. That is to say, that despite the overwhelming evidence that Black women and girls maintain a position of overrepresentation like none other, because they are not solely represented in these spaces, the mass of this evidence must be taken as mere excess and not exceptionality. The quandary of this conceptual arrangement that to speak about Black women in the excessive spaces of violence they are found within, nullifies willing the gendered violence of others, actually undergirds the paradigmatic framing of Black gender. Black

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[3] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," in *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003), 229.

gender mediations and imperatives are held captive to the gender claims and desires of others. Black gender is for the captor.

The opposition from this audience member, wagered as a question, is a not an exemplary moment. It is one example of the many refusals to engage with Black gender by way of a Black feminist initiated structural analysis. I have sat through countless graduate seminars, lecturers, conference presentations, feminist book clubs, where people contend to not understand the critical works of Black feminist writers. The tenor in the rooms harkens to a palatable discomfort, rather than simple misunderstanding. Body language and choice of words makes it ever present that the contention is with the terms spoken, the context of the speaker, and the implications of what is said. These gestures are symbolic of an outright refusal to engage Black gender, and specifically Black women, via the terms used to theorize structural violence. As Black women announce continuously that it is as if Black gender does not exist, the response is simply that Black women misunderstand the terms of gender.[4] The concerns here emerge in responses to this announced lack of understanding which in fact is not confusion but hostility.

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[4] In *Death Beyond Disavowal: The Impossible Politics of Difference*, Grace K. Hong offers a pernicious reading of Audre Lorde and her use of Malcolm X to align the underpinnings of her politics to the radical Black movements of the 1960. Hong writes, "Insofar as Lorde situates herself – Black, lesbian, feminist – as the exact nexus that Black nationalism must repress in order for its imagined community based on Blackness to cohere, she is unrepressing, and is thus coming back to haunt,"3. Hong misappropriates much in her reading of Lorde's alignment with Malcolm X, however what undergirds this particular reading is a strident insistent on employing terms of identity as that which situates Blackness. Thus Lorde is held captive to the terms of Black, lesbian, feminist and as Malcolm X is held to Black Nationalism. Arguably lesbian, feminist, and nationalism are the only terms within view. The contexts of what constitutes both Lorde and X with respect to Black specific violence is lost upon this argumentation strategy. By granting explanatory power to discursive renderings of self location versus placing focus on the structures of violence that position Blackness within the world, the harsh realities of what mires Lorde to X are ignored. Instead Black Nationalism is reduced to a "sexist" "masculinist" political arrangement and little is done to assert under what conditions of violence are Lorde and X both called to politics. What are the political necessities of Blackness? This argument tries to make identity Black versus recognizing how the possibility of identity as difference for the Black is structurally crowded out by the multiply situated violence of antiblackness. As such the particularities of Black gendered and sexualized emergences are ignored as preconscious associations are employed to elide and ignore the perpetuity of slavery

The conundrum of Black womanhood has been stated time and again by Black feminist theorists, yet their contentions bear repeating. Angela Y. Davis asserts that "Black women were practically anomalies"[5] under slavery, citing that "If Black women were hardly 'women' in the accepted sense, the slave system also discourage male supremacy in men."[6] For Spillers in under slavery, "we lose at least *gender* difference *in the outcome*, and the female body and the male body become territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender-specific."[7] Saidiya Hartman argues in the same vein, "The captive female does not possess gender as much as she is possessed by gender—that is, by way of the particular investment in and use of the body."[8] Yet again Dorothy Roberts states, "not only were Black women exiled from the norm of true womanhood, but their maternity was blamed for Black people's problems."[9] In concluding this list of examples, although this is by no means a conclusion, Sylvia Wynter, contends that "the black women's struggle is quite other."[10]

Political disagreement emerges with respect to the genealogy of thought the above quotes are working within, as this labor critically argues that a condition of gendered singularity exists for Blackness. Cultural Studies, Ethnic Studies, and Gender and Sexuality Studies are premised upon an assumed relationality at the level of constitution with respect to their (inter)disciplinary subjects of concern. Disciplinary conviviality is foregone when approached with Blackness as the illuminating

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as the aligning force of Blackness. Thus Blackness can only be taken as an "imagined" existence rather than a position of structured subjugation.

[5] Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race, and Class*, (New York: Random House, 1983), 5.

[6] Ibid., 7

[7] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 206.

[8] Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 100.

[9] Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 10.

[10] Sylvia Wynter, "Proud Flesh Inter/views: Sylvia Wynter." *Proud Flesh: New Afrikan Journal of Culture, Politics & Consciousness* no. 4 (2006): 25.

contradistinctive element that places focus on ontological rather than experiential freedom imperatives. Furthermore, oppositions are wagered against the political investment in theorizing Blackness as object rejecting the inscription of subjectivity grafted post-emancipation. As Jared Sexton argues framing of the paradigmatic disassociation between the post-colonial subject and post-emancipation Blackness, that such "bear a common refusal to admit to significant differences of the structural position born of the discrepant histories between black and their political allies, actual or potential."[11] For the intent of this project, Black gender, operates in the theoretical sphere with respect to an arrangement of power that situates Blackness as object of the inquiries of subjects. Blackness becomes the stand in example used to authorize coherent grammars of suffering, however wagered, refusing attention to Black feminist labors that argue to the contrary. As Spillers concludes her groundbreaking essay, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," "we are less interested in joining ranks of gendered femaleness than gaining the *insurgent* ground as female social subject."[12] Thus locating consensus through suffering is not only antithetical to the labors of radical Black feminist projects, the gesture simultaneous incorporates Black gender employing its obscurity without critical attention to why opacity is its commonplace.

The concern here is not with liberal gender politics that contends that the denial of rights bearing citizenship is the space from which to think politics and inclusion but with more radically positioned, left-situated, politics that use violence and conditions of death as the predicate for grammars of suffering. My contention is the veiling of Black suffering under the auspicious claims against kinship and/or economic structures of violence as the nexus of Black gender arrangements forecloses critical introspection into the engendering violence of Blackness.[13] This occurs through

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[11] Jared C. Sexton, "People-of-Color-Blindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery," *Social Text* 28 no. 2 (2010): 48.
[12] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 229.
[13] For more in-depth arguments on the antagonism that exist between Blackness and the political imperative of capital and kinship, see Frank B. Wilderson, III, "Gramsci's Black Marx: Whither the

the aligning of kinship and/or economic structural terms as the truth of suffering such that heteropatriarchy and/or neoliberalism come to stand in as that which animates the political and social suffering of all. Hence the grandiose nature of the violence of slavery is appended to collective conversations about injury that cannot think the genesis of Blackness and what animates its problematics. To think Black gender as a suffering subject of heteropatriarchy, neoliberalism, or various tendrils of the state or social political associations, necessitates that Blackness be taken as a subjective status of being. These theoretical logics do not question what produces Blackness as a category and thus mistakes slavery as a legal, social, and political institution that was abolished setting the stage for emergent new forms of domination to enrapture Black people. Furthermore, it cannot address the theoretical labor required to address this problematic, as Hartman poses,

> How can we understand the racialized engenderment of the Black female captive in terms other than deficiency or lack in relation to normative conditions and instead understand this production of gender in the context of very different economies of power, property, kinship, race, and sexuality.[14]

Though we need not assume that the use of "captive" by Hartman is contained to the legal institution of slavery. Black captivity bleeds across (post)modernity. The ethicality of the propelling of Blackness into modernity cannot be critically questioned without an attention to slavery as a paradigm of structural positioning that shapes and augments Blackness as object in contradistinction to subjects. Furthermore, a critique of gendered existence must always contend with an engendered gender position to which the protections, however small and problematic, are always foreclosed.

Slave in Civil Society?" *Social Identities* 9.2 (2003): 225-240, and Spillers, "'All the Things You Could Be by Now If Sigmund Freud's Wife Was Your Mother' : Psychoanalysis and Race" in *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003), 376-427.
[14] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*,*100*

Using the logic of heteropatriarchy to forge an argument about the use of sexual violence against Native women as a tool of conquest ushering in the settler colonial state, Andrea Smith argues "the project of colonial sexual violence establishes the ideology that Native bodies are inherently violable – and by extension, that Native lands are also inherently violable."[15] Developing the argument of the use of sexual violence as a colonial project Smith places sexual violence against Native women in conversation with the status of Black women, and experience by other nonwhite women. The seeming similarities between the constitutive forces of sexual violence against Native and other nonwhite women alongside Black women manifest two assumptions. First it is assumed that the force of sexual violence is being wagered against an intelligible body, which is deracinated after the fact. Secondly, that there is a cartography to the application of sexual violence so that it functions as a means to an end. With respect to Blackness, Smith codes Black vulnerability to sexual violence experientially rather than ontologically, arguing,

> The history of sexual violence and genocide among Native women illustrates how gender violence functions as a tool for racism and colonialism among women of color in general. For example African American women were also viewed as inherently rapable. Yet where colonizers used sexual violence to eliminate Native populations, slave owners used rape to reproduce an exploitable labor force. (The child of Black slave women inherited their slave status.) And because Black women were seen as property of their slave owners, their rape at the hands of these men did not 'count.'[16]

What this example demonstrates is a true statement taken as the totality of condition of captivity when it is just one example of the gamete of sexual violence central to slavery. This account reads

[15] Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*, (New York: South End Press, 2005), 12.
[16] Ibid., 15-6.

sexual violence against Black women as premised by a logic when it fact it was illogical thus making the preciseness of it form and function ever difficult to chart.

Reproduction of slaves, through sexually violent practices, while valuable to the economic structure of slavery as an institution does not account for the mechanisms of sexual violence that exceed this logic and were quotidian and mundane in practice. Sexual violation pervades every encounter with the Black, from capture, to slave ship, to coffle, to auction block, to plantation, to freedom. As such seeing Black women as rapeable and their rapes as valuable to slavery as an economic system, reads the violence as both patriarchal and economic in nature in a gesture that crowds out critical thought about how Black women as objects of slavery were produced. The sexual violence at the heart of the authorization of captivity and central to the status of slaveness, employs sexually violent logics not solely within the brutality of rape but along the very logic that grants authorization to the physical body of slaves and the captive status of Blackness more broadly. The sexual violation of Black women provides the nexus of thought to apprehend the gravity of such practices, what Spillers describes as "the principal point of passage between the human and the non-human world."[17] Yet, we are still faced with the conundrum that the use of sexual violence was not stratified across gender making all slaves subject to the routine nature of its brutal application. What then should be made of this evidence? To disregard this fact and render it irrelevant to discussion on gender would be to deny the evidence of the historical record to appease political demarcations that do not fit squarely with the lived existences of slaves.

The assumption that gender can announce a shared grammar of suffering, is a farce for the Black. At the level of what goes unspoken, there is an inherent belief of political and social collectivity amongst Blackness and racialized beings. There is minimal conceptual labor given to thinking the associative relationships between Blackness and social spaces post-emancipation as

[17] Spillers, "Interstices," 155.

carrying deep appendages to captivity. The assumption of Black political ascent from slavery is tethered by the production of the social space. The social premises the context upon which political affiliation can emerge. Yet the framing of sociality, what arranges entities as pre political designations requires a critical lens. Slavery as irreconcilable violence emerges most insidiously and violently is in the formative relationship of political and social structures. The conundrum of contemporary studies on race and gender is that the assumptive logics of the theoretical underpinnings position the suffering of Blackness discursively in a lateral relationship with conditions of suffering that slavery and its afterlife have made possible.[18] The political formulation of the designation women of color, as a political body, is fuse by assumptive social structures about the role of gender and sexuality in inflicting violence against subjects. Subjectivity is taken as a given. Objectivity can only be taken into consideration in so far as it is a wavering designation. To think Black gender as object would mean the formulation of racialized gendered theories holds Blackness as captive to their logics. However, such is true. Blackness is held captive to theories that use collectivity as the premise for association. Without holding Blackness in singularity, Black gender becomes confined to a textual theorization of experience and the paradigmatic structure of the sexual violence at the center of its engendering is taken as example rather than the essential quality of its formulation.

While much has been said in respects to the damning revelations Hartman makes about the potentials and possibilities of slave agency, in the first section of her monograph *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, by returning to the second half of this work entitled "The Subject of Freedom," a more concise and politically challenging conceptual map can be drawn of the relationship that exist between dominant discursive understandings of political violence relationally to the social violence Hartman argues continues to produce post-emancipation Black subjection. There is a pervasive refusal by most scholarship on race and gender that there is a

[18] See Sexton, "People-of-Color-Blindness"

continuity of being that exist for the Black across the shift from slavery to emancipation, which was not and could not be abolished through slavery's formal legal end. This occurs first through a denial of the power the social possesses in replicating and producing the unspoken terror of Black suffering, which is often carried out independent of state control. And secondly through a gross misrecognition that slavery, as the founding violence of modernity, produced Blackness as *the sole* category subjected to the captive logics of its violent regime for which sexual violence orchestrated the grounds for captivity versus sexual violence being used as practices of domination.

Hartman introduces the social as the realm particular to the continual subjection of Black life in the afterlife of slavery, by clearly distinguishing the injury it produces from that of the economic and political domains. She enters this argument through a critical engagement with "The Freedman's Case of Equity,"[19] by George Washington Cable and carries the critique into an engagement with the political theory of Hannah Arendt. Concerned with the designation of Blackness as condition of permanent inferiority, Hartman argues that Cable, in disagreement with the racial segregation upheld by the *Civil Rights Cases* of 1883, "insisted that the race line only served to perpetuate relations of mastery and subservience."[20] In response to the myriad forms of discrimination Cable witnessed as a result of the *Civil Rights Cases*, Hartman argues that Cable prescribed racial uplift as a solution to the problems of race, assuming that if Black people were able to carry designations of class as the basis of character like white men, then some level of equality would be achieved. Hartman states his premises were "that without the intrusion of offensive racial distinctions, just assortment would occur agreeably, naturally, and heedful of decency and refinement."[21] This places the burden of racial equality onto Black people to prove their worthiness of it, while removing the burden from whites. Hartman argues, "Despite [Cable's] opposition to segregation and condemnation of the aversion

[19] George Washington Cable, "The Freedman's Case of Equity," in *The Negro Question: A Selection of Writings on Civil Rights in the South*, (Garden City, 1958).
[20] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 165.
[21] Ibid., 166.

that led to the violation of the rights and liberties of the freed, racial feelings, social preferences, and natural affinities figured prominently in Cable's vision of a liberal democratic order."[22] Relying on the logics of the liberal democratic promise of equal access to economic liberty for all, the solution posed by Cable, which hinges upon Black behavioral modifications, fails to grasp hold of the fact that "all Blacks not visibly servants were considered 'an assault upon the purity of private society.'"[23] The designation of all Blacks as subjects of injury is one that an economic logic cannot apprehend as it is not one's class that subjects them to injury but the symbolic marker of their flesh.

Taking this argument further through an interrogation of the assertion by Hannah Arendt that the French Revolution was driven by a moral regard for the life conditions of the impoverished that were not similarly held by the United States for its Black slaves, Hartman holds that, Arendt champions the ability of the US in not allowing the perils of morals to taint the sanctity of the American Revolution. In opposition to this claim, Hartman argues, "[Arendt] decries the social as the intrusion of bodily needs and biological life process into the domain of politics. It designated the triumph of necessity over reason. However, this obsession with the bodily and biological life processes also characterized the occluded emergence of the social question in the United States…"[24] The production of "the social question in the United States" is not produced by the state itself but by a biological stratification and the body politic produced of sociality. The moral disregard Arendt holds that US political structures demonstrated in relations to the plight of Black slaves, was not a general moral disregard that usurped all morality from political necessity, but is a fundamental disregard integral to the relationship of politics and Blackness alone. It is the "opacity" of Black life that renders Black bodies subject to "the surveillance and regulatory intervention of the state" and

[22] Ibid., 167.
[23] Ibid., 168.
[24] Ibid., 169.

"necessitate[s] both the state's management and ostensible withdrawal."[25] Politics is not indebted to an absolute regulation of Blackness because the Black will be guarded and policed with or without the extension of political investment into the everyday lives of Black people.

Hartman moves the reader away from unwavering focus on Black subjection in the economic and/or political spheres, not to say that Black life is not affected by those structures, but to argue that Black bodies are already regulated socially before entering into economic and political contracts. The law has an expectant obligation to regulate the economic and the political under the purview of equal protections, not to say this always occurs but the expectation is there nonetheless. However, the law has marked the configuration of sociality outside of its reach. As Hartman quotes a segment of the decision rendered in *Roberts v. City of Boston*, which reads, "'Prejudice, if it exists, is not created by the law and cannot be changed by the law.'"[26] For Hartman this sentiment holds true from pre-civil war legal cases such as *Roberts* and post-civil war cases such as *Plessy v. Ferguson*, arguing, "The slippery logic that spawned this defiled offspring contended that racial discrimination was not a badge of slavery; in short, the enduring condition of subjection had nothing to do with slavery. It claimed that these racial taxonomies were neutral and noninjurious and thus they bore no relation to the degradation of slavery."[27] From here the conundrum of racial Blackness arises, the laws regulation of slavery as *only* chattel bondage, can only provide protection from the same or similar conditions of bondage within the sectors the law controls, the economic and the political. This right is granted to all subjects entitled to equal protection under the law. The law has no concern with mediating the first order of slavery, that all slaves were Black, and thus subjected to a condition of natal injury. The inability of law to consider aspects of social life, the symbolic value of

[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., 192.
[27] Ibid.

race held in everyday interactions, as evidence of any type of harm, silently reifies the existence and power of the social rule of antiblackness.

Hartman contends that "police power," as ends towards racial segregation in the post-emancipation period, was exercised by the power of the state towards the protection of "the health and happiness of the greater body,"[28] in public spaces. However, police power was not solely exercised by the state but also extended by "all whites" over Blacks. "Police power legitimated the restriction and regulation of liberty and property in the name of the public welfare and the health and prosperity of the population."[29] However public welfare, health and prosperity were not concerns only of the state as Hartman professes, "If public good was inseparable from the self-certainty of whiteness, then segregation was the prophylactic against this feared bodily intrusion and dissolution."[30] The social fluidity of whiteness as a subject identity was formed at the violent expense of Blackness' inability to perform the same task. While whiteness became shaped by various subject categories, such those marked by class, gender, and sexuality, Blackness became marked by the rigidity of singularity. Physical racial separation carried out by the state and all whites alike upheld the social order of the post-emancipation nineteenth century period through the civil rights era of the mid-twentieth century. While white life continued to develop socially, Black life was cordoned to a fixed position of existence. Whites were able to know themselves as a multiplicity of social beings because Black people were denied access to this form of self-naming and deputized social privilege. "The social body was made possible by the banishment and abjection of Blacks, the isolation of dangerous elements from the rest of the population, and the containment of contagion."[31] Though in the post-civil rights moment, white no longer functions as proxy to this arrangement, as the

[28] Ibid., 170.
[29] Ibid., 198.
[30] Ibid., 199.
[31] Ibid.

formulation of people of color in contradistinction to Blackness widens the scope of engagement so that the divide is more aptly black/non-black vs. white/black or non-white.[32]

It can be maintained that police power continues to thwart Black life in the post-civil rights moment in more pernicious ways as whiteness is not the solely contradistinctive element. That even as banishment and outright Black abjection are no longer the primary designations of Blackness, the paradigm of isolation and containment of Blackness is wholly intact. Sociality maintains a conceptual eliding of the logics of modernity's founding violence, manifest in the premise of the coalition, which an unfiltered engagement with Blackness has the potential to expose. Blackness reveals the "contagion" that the logics of subjectivity, gendered or otherwise, under modernity have reasoned out of recognition, that a being can be continually born of injury, produced by an irrational susceptibility to violence. The overall prosperity of the "population" with respect to the social configuration of shared space and representation cannot congregate with Blackness. The very distillations of political groups are fueled by an incessant desire to unhinge the implications set forth by Black feminists and other Black specific theoretical logics, that argue Blackness is subjugated by violence qua violence, gratuitous impositions with no means or ends. The theoretical framing of sexual violence employed here argues within this respect that Blackness is engendered by the process of naming that force invisibility into the terms of gendered suffering. Furthermore, this introspection also interrogates the impetus for theoretical correctives that mark Black women as the wielders of subjugating violence. Such cannot be proven that Black women possess such a world shaping level of power however such is imagined without any recourse to thinking the genesis and reverberations of the engendering modes that constitute Black gender.

[32] See Sexton, "People-of-Color-Blindness"

Can political theory sustain a conversation about the structuring force of generations of sexual violence and the contradictions that arise when engaging gender in the historical record of slavery? Is such a labor possible without harkening back to the interpersonal or identity positioning as the way to account for what goes unspoken and largely unthought about that which constitute what it means to Black in a world born of slavery? Sexual violence appears and disappears in recollections of what slavery "did" to the Black in a manner that is largely fleeting. For the purposes of this project I want to hold sexual violence and its relationship to gender at the center of analysis to forcibly engage in theory how Blackness continues to be sutured by slavery as a lascivious marking that enters, takes, and makes of Blackness whatever it so chooses. As such the blurring of sexual and gendering demarcations under slavery point to the ways in which Black subjection blurs and obfuscates the very logics for which politics engenders the scope and plenitude of the ends of violence. I argue sexual violence was not used to control slaves but to make slaves, and not exclusively for procreative means, but in the sense of determining the limitless grasp that power can assert over the body of Blackness.

Chapter one of *Engendering Blackness*, revisits one of the most controversial chapters in *Black Skin, White Masks* by Frantz Fanon, "The Woman of Color and the White Man." By engaging the reading of *Je Suis Martiniquaise/La Negresse blanche* by Mayotte Capécia provided by Frantz Fanon, the intent is to critical explain what Fanon is "diagnosing" as the essential antagonism that disorients the articulation of Black gender and sexual identities as potential sites of mobility. Specifically, focus is placed upon how identity formulates itself in contradistinction to the status of Black women. To this accord, this chapter makes a critical introspection into the role Black gender plays in theories of subject violence by looking at the conceptual formulations of the Terrorist Assemblage by Jasbir Puar. Specifically, the interest here is in how theories on gender and sexuality, as modes of thinking violence in their own instantiations, misrecognize the role Blackness plays in the theoretical

functionality of these categories. *Gorilla, My Love* by Toni Cade Bambara is placed in conversation with Fanon and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, to emerge a theory about the misappropriated fear of Black female wielded power. Thus this maneuver questions how the assessment of violence pertaining to Black women seen solely through the lens of sexuality as the centering premise of suffering, under theorizes and elides several critical aspects of constitution of Black gender and its relationship to production of subjectivity.

By engaging a reading of *Kindred* by Octavia Butler in conversation with the U.S. Supreme Court Case *Prigg v. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, chapter two interrogates how, the confrontation with the historical record is elided by contemporary political desires that assume mobility of condition can be placed on the past by the implementation of present will. That is to say, there is a prevailing political belief that the historical subjugation of Black gender can be displaced by a theoretical reengagement with its structures using contemporary modes of reason. Through an examination of the strident disconnect that exist between the positionality and desires of Dana, the protagonist of *Kindred*, as a figure that exist both in the "past" and "present" of slavery. She is jolted across space and time into the antebellum South. Her arrival is anticipated though she does not expect to find herself in this place. She is dishelmed and confused having travelled the distance between 1976 and 1870 in a matter of time so small it appeared almost incalculable. Dana is placed in continual proximity to the machinations of sexual violence, although her awareness of her openness to such is delayed through the imparting of descriptions of slavery that betray this reality. By placing *Kindred,* in conversation with *Prigg,* this chapter challenges the assumptive belief of political theory that the relationship of Blackness to the law of slavery is determined by proximity to the physical plantation.

In chapter three, literature is placed into conversation with cinema, by reading the 2013 independent film *Belle*, directed by Amma Asanta, against the narrative labors of *Beloved* by Toni

Morrison. The concern here is with the descriptive weight given to the fictionalized tales of Black women in the history of slavery. Both imaginary works are haunted by the specter of sexual violence however in the attempt of *Belle* to narrate the individual exceptionality of Dido Elizabeth Belle Lindsay, the script struggles to evade sexual openness as the conditions that bore Dido into the world and also place her in relationship to her white counterparts. However, what the mise-en-scene reveals is that there are differing relations of what constitutes Dido in political desires and the structural placement of her body cinematically. The chapter concludes by wallowing in the contradictions of the rememory at the heart of *Beloved*. The coming together of the inspiration gathered from the story of Margaret Garner, to imagine Sethe and the world of violence that exists around her provides telling implications for the ways sexual violence haunts the past, present, and future narrative possibilities of slavery. By concluding with *Beloved*, the political intentionality in the gesture is to show how focus on the lived experiences of Black women under slavery must always contend with slavery as a paradigmatic tether by sexual violence. By forcing an engagement with the production of the sexual and gendered realms dire implications emerge about the constitution of Blackness writ large, which are far more political damning than a focus on sexual violence as primary wielded for reproductive value.

The final chapter *Corregidora* by Gayl Jones is examined for what it refuses to offer descriptively about the generational transfer of sexual violence. The protagonist, Ursa is born of a complex arrangement wrought with the sexual captivity and violation of her foremothers. The power *Corregidora* carries as a text, is placed in its intensified focus of sex and the "genital fantasies" imposed upon the existences of Black women. However, what the text reveals in the tumultuous relationships between Ursa and Black men is that the grasp of the sexual impulses of slavery situates Blackness as a whole. By critically reading, *Humphrey v. Utz*, a Louisiana Supreme Court case where a male slave is sexually mutilated until his death, this chapter contests the stratification of Black gender

based on stylized expressions and ask instead how sexual violence engender the Black within the world. Thus by contesting the social arrangements of kinship structures by way of centering the mother law of slavery, contradictions in thought are exposed when considering the assumptions of difference attributed to performance of gender without respect to structures of violence sexual violence as a structure of naming.

The intervention being wagered is a forceful shift from thinking slavery as generalized violence. Instead the focus is recast onto the particular terrors inherent to sexuality and its violences. The damning fact that sexual violence can be found repeatedly in the scant accounts of slaves in the historical record, asserts its predominance as central to the self-making of subjectivity as it was structured against the status of slaves. The engendering of Black gender, places the naming of Blackness within the terms of subjective violence that hold it captive to logics that are wholly inept to account for what tethers this arrangement. Thus Blackness becomes suspended into obscurity by various competing subject desires to authorize visibility by ways of the structural unintelligibility that Blackness arises from in the first instance of the encounter that made sex that marker of absolute otherness.

At the Intersections of Assemblages: Fanon, Capécia, and the Unmaking of the Genre Subject

> It is a political affair, as worldwide in scope as the other, but on a scale and in a form that is incommensurable, nonesuperposable. It is also a perceptual affair, for perception always goes hand in hand with semiotics, practice, politics, theory. One sees, speaks and thinks on a given scale, and according to a given line that may or may not conjugate with the other's line, even if the other is still oneself… Not only does one speak literally, one also lives literally, in other words, following lines, whether connectable or not, even heterogeneous ones. Sometimes it doesn't work when they are homogeneous.
>
> – Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*

> …it's the difference between those who wanted to aid the newly freed to fit into the social order and those who had a vision of black freedom that was about transforming the social order, about the promise of revolution, and ultimately, about Jubilee. So I think that's one way to think about the different models of community imagines by the solidarity forces in relation to the ambitions and desires of the formerly enslaved community.
>
> – Saidiya Hartman & Frank B. Wilderson, "The Position of the Unthought"

The figuration of Black gender ruptures the axis of critical theory, which assumes political prescription as the logical departure from the descriptive gesture to think violence. Simply stated, Black gender disallows political orientation to unthink the stasis of its conditions of violence, whether the offered prescription is 'real' or 'imagined.' Violence is locked in the celebration and the disavowal, the embrace and repulsion of Blackness as genre,[1] which is not exclusive to logics of gendering but presents a profound nexus there. This is to say violence, as a paradigm not solely conducive to a singular act enraptures Blackness prior to and in excess of subject categorization. This statement is not illusive or hypothetical in its orientation, nor does it dismiss the specificities of Black life. Contrarily so, the point here is to apprehend how deeply entrenched violence reveals itself

[1] In the interview "Proud Flesh Inter/views: Sylvia Wynter," Wynter explains the usage of the theory of 'genre' throughout her work by stating, 'Although I use the term 'race,' and I have to use the term 'race,' 'race' itself is a function of something else which is much closer to 'gender.' Once you say, 'besides ontogeny, there's sociogeny,' then there cannot be only one mode of sociogeny; there cannot be only one mode of being human; there are a multiplicity of modes. So I coined the word 'genre,' or I adapted it, because 'genre' and 'gender' come from the same root. They mean 'kind,' one of the meanings is 'kind.' Now what I am suggesting is that "gender" has always been a function of the instituting of 'kind."

when Blackness is engaged critically from the perspective of thinking suffering at the level of being when theory attempts to Blacken the world versus whiten (or more aptly so de-Blacken) the scope of engagement.

This chapter is developed as a further introspection into and elaboration upon a previous argument I presented along with Frank B. Wilderson III in our co-authored article entitled "The Violence of Presence: Metaphysics in a Blackened World."[2] We grounded our premising logic in the following, "Ideally, philosophers (studying metaphysics) and critical theorists (studying the relational status of the subject) should not be able to labor without contemplating the violence which enables Black (non)being; but, in fact, the evasion of Blackness-qua-violence is what gives these disciplines their presumed coherence."[3] Our point was to briefly examine the theoretical labor of Elaine Scarry in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* and Jasbir K. Puar in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* as both representative of seminal works that in some ways shifted institutional discussions on subject violence. Yet the assumptive logic that undergirds each argument presents an evasion of a conversation on violence that is limitless in its essence and application, that being Black specific violence. Furthermore, as demonstrated in the case with Puar, which I will take up more in depth here, any such attempts to theorize violence using Blackness, and particularly Black women as the location to think modes of violence, the theory is marked as antiquated and counterintuitive to the subject's theoretical progression towards liberation.

Where I intend to carry this argument forward, in this chapter and as the ground premise for this project, is in terms of thinking "the evasion of Blackness-qua-violence" in two respects. First by examining the tendency to accuse the indictment as the cause of violence. As in the case with the attempt to give a description of Black violence, the descriptive gesture itself is rendered both the

[2] Patrice Douglass and Frank B. Wilderson, III., "The Violence of Presence: Metaphysics in a Blackened World.," *The Black Scholar* 43, no. 4 (2013): 117-23.
[3] Ibid., 3.

cause and the further perpetuation of the violence it seeks to name and identify. This is especially the case when the theorists attempt to wallow in the contradictions of violence tethered to Blackness. The assessment of Black violence on a meta-level demonstrates many inadequacies in the inability of the prescriptive response to remedy the totality of the problems at hand. Also, the ease towards prescription over description can underestimate the extent to which the violence has permeated all the realms of life. Secondly, a more insidious tendency of the evasion of Blackness-qua-violence is to take issue with the 'imperfect' nature of the subject at the center of theories of violence, when that subject is Black. By disqualifying the centrality of the Black subject, the newly emerged theory is often times assumptively no different in terms of its theoretical understandings of violence. The only shift is who is seen as a more viable subject of these seemingly nuanced theories of violence over and in-lieu of privileging the Black bodies. While Blackness is not effaced completely from the logic, the theory makes clear that while Blacks can be included they need not and cannot be the center of theoretical inquiry if others are to retain possibility through prescription.

In the second chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*, "The Women of Color and the White Man," Franz Fanon critiques *Je suis martiniquaise* by Mayotte Capécia in a manner that has been widely deemed by feminist scholars as a sexist engagement with a feminist literary text.[4] Fanon approaches the text out of a forced necessity as he writes, "The enthusiastic reception that greets this book in certain circles forces us to analyze it."[5] *Je suis martiniquaise* was lauded by French literary circles, which contributed to Capécia being the first Black woman to receive the coveted award

[4] See Gwen Bergner, "Who is That Masked Woman? or, The Role of Gender in Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks." *PMLA* 110, no. 1 (19950: 75-88, and Rei Chow, "The Politics of Admittance: Female Sexual Agency, Miscegenation, and the Formation of Community," in *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Anthony C. Alessandrini (New York: Routledge, 1999), 35-58. Routledge: New York, NY.

[5] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Markmann (New York: Grove, 1967), 42.

Grand Prix Littéraire de Antilles.[6] However, this same reception was not felt amongst Fanon or Negritude writers during this political moment.[7] Fanon most troubled by Mayotte Capécia, the protagonist in the novel who also shares the name of the writer, who "asks nothing, demands nothing, except a bit of whiteness in her life."[8] Capécia, the protagonist, works as a laundress in her adult life, who upon finding out that her maternal grandmother was white reenvisions her life through the libidinal possibility she feels being a product of "mixture" and also contemplates what her life could have been if whiteness permeated her existence further, "I made up my mind that I could never love anyone but a white man, a blue-eyed blond, a Frenchman."[9]

> Most notable critiques of Fanon, such as the one presented by Susan Andrade, suggests that, Fanon launches a virulent critique of Mayotte Capécia, using her first-person narrative as a transparent paradigm of Black alienation, even comparing her to the arch-racist, Gobineau. His reading permits no ironic distance between the author and her first person narrator… Most damning of all, he accuses Capécia and, by extension, all Caribbean women of color who marry lighter men (either white or mulatto), of 'lactification,' or attempting to whiten the race.[10]

Fanon indicts Capécia for representing a certain tendency toward Blackness, which is in no way presented as a representative critique "all Caribbean women of color" writ large. Instead he is concerned with how Capécia narrates, assumedly both the author and the protagonist, the demarcation of existence in white and Black terms. He takes particular issue with the insistence by Capécia that "All I know is that he had blue eyes, blond hair, and a light skin, and that I loved him"

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[6] T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, "Fanon and Capécia," in *Frantz Fanon: Conflicts and Feminisms*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 36.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 42.
[9] Ibid., 47.
[10] Susan Andrade, "The Nigger of the Narcissist: History, Sexuality, and Intertextuality in Maryse Condé's *Heremakhonon*," *Callaloo* 16, no. 1 (1993), 219.

which Fanon rearticulates to mean, "I loved him because he had blue eyes, blond hair, and a light skin."[11] Fanon heeds this warning before proceeding with a deeper reading of the text, "We who come from the Antilles know one thing only too well: Blue eyes, the people say, frighten the Negro."[12] The "we" symbolizes not simply Caribbean men of color but Caribbean people of color, Black people, who Capécia manically seeks to distance herself from. This distancing is both gendered and ungendered simultaneously. However, Capécia is equally enamored with thoughts of having a white grandmother, the potentials of life had she had a white father, and her beckoning possibilities for marrying a white man all while seeing Black men as useless and potentially harmful aspects of her dreams. However, there is one factor that is essential to her logic of transformation. It is not simply that whiteness must be embraced and Black men effaced but that Capécia herself as a Black woman be erased to open up the blockage towards her transcendence. "If she [her mother] had married a white man, do you suppose I should have been completely white?"[13]

Fanon's proclamation that "I know nothing about her,"[14] in reference to a particular trope of Black womanhood, triggers Rey Chow in "The Politics of Admittance: Female Sexual Agency, miscegenation, and the formation of community in Frantz Fanon" to assert Fanon perceives, "women of color are all alike: in spite of the differences in pigmentation between the Negress and the mulatto, for instance, they share a common, 'nauseating' trait —the desire to become white— that can be generalized in the form of 'every woman'."[15] In attempts to lodge a conversation about race vis-à-vis gender in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Chow concludes "black subjecthood" in the text "is premised on the irreducible (racial) difference between Black and white people, thus, Fanon's descriptions of the women of color are paradoxically marked by their non-differentiation, their

[11] Fanon, *Black Skin White Mask*, 43.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid., 47.
[14] Ibid., 180.
[15] Chow, "The Politics of Admittance," 39.

projection (onto femininity) of qualities of indistinguishability and universality."[16] However this reading displaces and elides the description of being that invokes the statement "I know nothing about her." It is not that Fanon knows nothing about "her" as a conflated representation of all women of color, Black women in this context, but that he knows nothing of 'her' that carries the same or similar fantasy of being "raped by a negro" the "psychosexuality of the white woman."[17] Yet Chow implies that what Fanon describes as a psychic trait of white womanhood in fact "indicates that all women fantasize being hurt in sexual acts."[18] What is revealed at this moment in BSWM is not about the act of rape itself but about the embodiment of rapeability and power inherent in the fantasy of one's own rape, which is racially distinguished.

There is nothing common to all women about the rape fantasy. In fact, this fantasy is a power white women possess over Black men *and* Black women alike. Black women cannot fantasize into being something that they have always already been deemed to be at the level of ontology, rapeable. In fact, this is what Fanon is seeking to suggest by saying "I know nothing about her." Fanon is not omitting histories of sexual violence nor is he suggesting that the actual act of rape is by fault of women. Instead in this psychoanalytic engagement with Blackness, Fanon is setting up a distinction between white women and Black women by refusing to allow the perception of their assumed equal vulnerabilities to violence to prevail. The fantasy of 'the woman of color' cannot will her own rape as an emblem of her own power, she cannot be 'the woman who rapes herself' as Fanon describes white female sexual desire. The instance on knowing nothing about her symbolizes that Fanon knows nothing about a condition of Black womanhood that is tethered to a human community of women universally situated by violence and desire, instead his readings of *Je Suis Martiniquaise* demonstrates a reading of Black gender that is constituted by a violent relationship of

[16] Ibid.
[17] Fanon, *Black Skin White Mask*, 179.
[18] Chow, "The Politics of Admittance," 45.

what it means to be Black in the world.

What Andrade, Chow and other critics of Fanon impose upon his reading of Capécia, is that the concern expressed by Fanon begins and ends with accusations towards her behaviors as a woman thus by extension functions as an indictment of all women. However such critiques are largely ill-equipped to engage the diagnosis Fanon is attempting to work through, albeit it frustratingly so, which sees Capécia novel *and* its lauded reception by whites as demonstrating a truth about existence that "every woman in the Antilles" somehow knows, is that Black women are "trapped in a valued-less existence."[19] sutured by Blackness. For Fanon, "what Mayotte wants is a kind of lactification," or in other words "the race must be whitened," the desire is to "whiten the race, save the race" this all "to avoid falling into the pit of niggerhood."[20] The form of "valued-less" "niggerhood" Capécia seeks refuge from in the text is Black womanhood and all that it represents. Yet the critics of Fanon supplant his indictment of Capécia as a characteristic of his critique, shifting the diagnosis to falsely occupy the position as the cause of her suffering.

T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting critiques of the critiques of Fanon in the chapter "Fanon and Capécia" by taking seriously Fanon's diagnoses in "The Woman of Color and the White Man." Sharpley-Whiting extrapolates and takes forward what the critics of Fanon were critically unable to account for, Capécia's own distain for Black women. The inability to render this loathing of Black women, both self and other, as a symptom worth exploring is overshadowed by an incessant impulse to think sexism as the driving force of oppression towards Capécia by way of Fanon. Taking sexism as the center of Black female oppression reduces and lessens the purviews of Blackness-qua-violence with respect to gender. It displaces Black violence with a conception of human violence that situates all women in a human community sublated by their assumed equal potential for

[19] Sharpley-Whiting, "Fanon and Capécia," 33.
[20] Fanon, *Black Skin White Mask*, 179.

gendered harm.[21] Thus it leaves what is particularly "Black" about the situation of gender in *Je suis Martiniquaise* unattended to and essentially tacked onto conceptions of gender violence. Drawing on the work of Anna Julia Cooper, Sharpley-Whiting ask that we take serious the following, before engaging with the issues at hand in *Je suis Martiniquaise* "To ask Blacks what they are worth is in fact to ask them to justify their presence, the continued existence."[22] The symptoms Capécia exhibits in the text speak to an unconscious valuation of the impossibilities of Black life, represented centrally in Black womanhood, which is affirmed by a world order of valuation enacted through violence.

"Black*femme*phobia" for Sharpley-Whiting is what is situated at the center of Capécia's desires, arguing that "Fanon's impatient, dismissive reading of Capécia is not related to her interracial relationship proper"[23] but "exhibited in her oftentimes contemptuous and stereotyped sexualized portraits of Black femininity, in which the heroine incessantly tries to situate herself as 'different' from, or one step above Black women."[24] The assumption that Blackness functions in the texts as that which can be effaced "lovingly" seemingly without violence is in fact a falsity. As Sharpley-Whiting goes on to argue, "The articulation of love without racial *malaise* or exoticism guides Fanon's critique. Love – more specifically white male love – as a strategy of evasion/redemption, as a *moyen* through which to liberate oneself from Black female body and hence the historical reality of Black femaleness, is as futile as the mimetic strategies deployed in language."[25] While Capécia desires the love of white men her right to possess love is configured by

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[21] Wilderson argues in *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*, of the fundamental distinctions between antiblackness and Human violence by arguing, "whereas Humans exist on some plane of being and thus can become existentially present through some struggle for, of, or through recognition, Blacks cannot reach this plane. Spillers, Fanon, Hartman maintain that the violence that continually repositions the Black as a void of historical movement is without analog in the suffering dynamics of the ontologically alive," 38.
[22] Sharpley-Whiting, "Fanon and Capécia," 32.
[23] Ibid., 41.
[24] Ibid., 43.
[25] Ibid., 42.

her distinction from and distain of Black womanhood. In order for her to be loved there must remain a class of women for which love is not a possibility, and for which the violence of their condition is justified by the inability to transcend their inherent dysfunctions.

Unlike Chow, who reads gender in *BSWM* as meaning either "woman of color is either a black traitor (when she chooses the white man) or a white woman (when she chooses a black man),"[26] Sharpley-Whitening challenges this perception by engaging the shades of grey with respect to Blackness and gender in *Je suis martiniquaise* that might point more aptly to Fanon's disposition towards the text. "For Capécia… her heroine is consistently rendered no necessarily white but, most importantly, not black,"[27] thus adding another element to consider which is wholly unconsidered by Chow. It is not so much a matter of being situated Black in contradistinction to white and vice versa but instead about a level of proximity to Blackness which assesses value along a scale of gradations where "whiteness is undoubtedly… the ultimate goal"[28] but is not the only space for which Black devaluation is charted. What Sharpley-Whiting reveals is that Capécia, the novelist, demonstrates a distain for Blackness that is more intensive than Fanon's position that Capécia, the protagonist, "proceeds to turn her Blackness into an accident."[29]

La Negresse Blanche, written two years after *Je suis martiniquaise*, by Mayotte Capécia is where "the desire to transcend Black femininity… becomes ever-pressing."[30] Isaure the protagonist in *La Negresse Blanche* "struggles with her racially identity… She cannot be a mulâtresse, but she will not accept the term négress."[31] Blackness bars their entrance into the French human community. Isaure asserts her racial ambiguity against the unflinching racial markings of other Black women. For Isaure

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[26] Chow, "The Politics of Admittance," 46.
[27] the suffering dynamics of the ontologically alive," 38.
[27] Sharpley-Whiting, "Fanon and Capécia," 43.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Fanon, *Black Skin White Mask*, 46.
[30] Sharpley-Whiting, "Fanon and Capécia," 43.
[31] Ibid., 45.

Black women possess an innate quality to eat their "rs" and possess skin to Black to blush. Isuare offers herself ultimate credence against her maid Lucia asserting "Since her distant ancestors, imported by slave traders from the time of Father Labbat, there must not have been any mixing in her ancestry. Not a drop of white blood."[32] Lucia's slaveness locks her into an objective existence as the being of "the most pure African type" determined at the level of her body. As Sharpley-Whiting argues in regards to Isuare's descriptions of Lucia, "This Black woman is reduced to her base corporeal, specifically sexual, function" furthermore "for Lucia, love is sex, and sex is love. Thus her love story, or rather love stories are ones driven by sheer need for satiation."[33] To put this point another way, Lucia devours that which is near her and in order not to be devoured by what she represents Isuare is guided by an incessant need to mark herself as existing without any of the characteristics of being that emerged Lucia into the world, all of which were born of slavery.

Assessing the centrality of racelessness in Isuare's distain for Black women, Sharpley-Whiting poses a few questions that I would like to move forward with. "Why does she at the novel's end seek to exile herself to a country where she is neither Black, nor while, but 'raceless'? And finally, how does this self-imposed exile and desire to flee Blackness cloaked in ambiguity of racelessness relate to her contempt for black women?"[34] The function of raceless, beyond both Black and white, subject positioning is an essential positioning from which to think the presence of violence in relationship to Blackness. The propping up gesture performed by Capécia and Isuare, to assert themselves as capable of love and life in contrast to embodying worthlessness and lifelessness epitomized by Black womanhood is insidious engagement with Blackness that is found in many places. However, this engagement with Black gender as the ultimate other, is often elided or

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[32] Mayotte Capécia, *I Am a Martinican Woman & The White Negress: Two Novelettes*, trans. Beatrice Stith Clark, (Pueblo, CO: Passeggiata, 1997), 34.
[33] Sharpley-Whiting, "Fanon and Capécia," 43.
[34] Ibid., 47.

misrecognized in critiques of gender that do not aptly assess Black gender as a formation all its own. The universalism of gendered violence as a theoretical model to apprehend the truth of suffering for Black women will always fall short of accounting for just how Black womanhood disfigures understandings of the role gender and sexual violence play in the configuration of Blackness.

On Miss Moore's Lesson

Miss Moore as she is presented is "the only woman on the block with no first name."[35] She is "happy headed" and uses "proper speech" which we can assume is resultant from the fact that she is college educated. Of all the things about her she is hated, just like the winos who made this Harlem neighborhood unlivable. Or at least this is how Sylvia, the sassy young protagonist in *The Lesson*, a short story by Toni Cade Bambara, introduces her. She is "black as hell" and is just as laughable as "the junk man who went about his business like he was some big-time president" but somehow the parents of the children on this block entrusted them to her to "take responsibility for the young ones' education," though she to them was "not even related by marriage or blood."[36] All the while the adults talked about her "behind her back like a dog." Yet, she held some level of respect, enough for the children to engage her teachings and for the adults to entertain her sachets, gingerbread, books and of course again, entrusting her with their children.

Fat butt, Flyboy, Rosie Giraffe, Mercedes, June Bug, Q.T., Sugar, and Sylvia, joined Miss Moore for a lesson on a hot summer day, though they'd much rather "go to the pool or to the show where it's cool" referring to both the temperature and the aesthetic posturing of those their age, yet they are with Miss Moore, who is assumedly from all her descriptive weight, uncool and heavy on this hot day. Or they'd prefer spending time going to "the Sunset and terrorizing the West Indian

[35] Toni Cade Bambara, *Gorilla, My Love*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 87.
[36] Ibid., 87-8.

kids," but no they'll stay for the lesson today, because even such a desire could be rounded in by Miss Moore who would certainly turn this moment into a lesson about "brotherhood." So instead of fleeing the cab that Miss Moore hails for them, giving them five dollars and instructing that they calculate the tip upon arrival to their destination at exactly ten-percent, they follow her lead and end up on Fifth Avenue. Not jumping ship, as they desire, and going to the first bar-b-que they can find, but arriving at a place where, "everyone is dressed up in stockings. One lady in a fur coat, hot as it is." This because as Sylvia put its "white folks is crazy" and well, Miss Moore has a lesson to give.

These eight Black children and the Black woman who teaches them arrive at F.A.O Schwartz, emotionally the context of the lesson in this moment seems befuddled. Why thrust these children into a world, so unfamiliar and so wrought with the potential to harm their young psyches? Why here when along the way the children present such complicated and complex relations with one another that the lesson, or lessons, can be found there? See Sylvia calls "Flyboy a faggot anyways," Junebug punches Q.T. around, Sylvia and Sugar are perturbed by Mercedes, and overall the relations between the young ones are muddled with lessons on gender, sexuality, class, feminism, camaraderie, and a host of other conflicts that exist within the world. Yet, they arrive at F.A.O Schwartz, a designer toy store, close to their neighborhood, a place where none of them seem to have ever been. And they are presented with four hundred and eighty dollar paper weights as Miss Moore describes that are "made of semi-precious stones fussed together under tremendous pressure,"[37] yet the kids haven't the slightest clue what it is for, why it is so expensive, and value it has for their lives. But Miss Moore explains "it's to weigh paper down so it won't scatter and make your desk untidy," though none of these children have a desk or a designated space for homework. Sylvia makes clear "she know damn well what our homes look like cause she nosys around in them every chance she

[37] Ibid., 90.

gets."[38] Flyboy exclaims, "I don't even have a home"[39] yet they are at this toy store musing over items that cost more than their common sense will allow for understanding. Sailboats for one hundred ninety-five dollars, so expensive Sylvia becomes infuriated because "who'd pay all that when you can buy a sailboat set for a quarter at Pop's, a tube of glue for a dime, and a ball of string for eight cent?"[40]

Though it seems more fitting to ask, who would taunt these children with a world built on their exclusion, harming their emotional well-being by placing directly in their faces what they cannot own, what they perhaps may never have? However, we learn that for Miss Moore it was never her intention to entice the children with a desire to possess these things, although some left yearning to acquire what they saw. However Sugar got to the crux of the larger structural analysis at the heart of Miss Moore's lesson by saying "I don't think all of us here put together eat in a year what that sailboat cost."[41] This prompts Miss Moore to say, "Imagine for a minute what kind of society it is in which some people can spend on a toy what it would cost to feed a family of six or seven. What do you think?"[42] Sugar responds "that this is not much of a democracy."[43] When pressed about any further lessons learned for this day Sylvia says nothing, runs off and rejoices that she still have four dollars left over from the cab ride and the money belongs to Miss Moore.

If we stop to evaluate Miss Moore's lesson outside of the performance of what she taught, how she taught it, and other things she performatively missed or didn't engage in her teaching of the children, there appears another lesson. Miss Moore exists as a double entendre. She signifies as she speaks and as she is silent. She is symbolic is her actions and appearance. She inhabits a liminal space

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[38] Ibid., 91.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid., 92
[41] Ibid., 95.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.

as a dual invocation, both present and absent. Returning to the text to gauge "the lesson" not as Miss Moore presents it in action but as she is presented to us in description, another tale unfolds. Her "nappy hair," "black as hell" complexion suggests that she is situated in the language of asexuality, though her inability to read within a normative framing lends her to the text, I argue, as a queer figure. She is illegible to the heterosexual narrative arc, as "Miss" Moore, which connotes that she is not married and her care of other's children suggests she has none of her own. Sylvia's honest and critical description of her makes it feel as if she is other, different, somehow separate from everyone else. She is monstrous with skin so dark and feet "fish-white and spooky" and soulless because she looks like she's always going to church but "she never did."

Although descriptively Sylvia labors hard with charged language to mark Miss Moore as other by the end of the story Sylvia is speechless because she seems to have come to terms with the familiarity of Miss Moore's position in the world in a similar context to her own. Though Miss Moore as a figure lends herself to a queer reading, I argue that the entire community relation of this poor Black post emancipation depiction of Harlem is queer in its emergence and timeless existence. Children looked after by a woman of no known relation, unable to inhabit innocence with "cluttered up parks and pissed" on walls and stairwells, homelessness, poverty, and overall precariousness with regards to sociality. The "block" as Sylvia refers, is marked by murkiness that is structurally violent in form and function. The block represents in this case Harlem, but more broadly speaking the constitution of Blackness across space and time. The block is everywhere and nowhere; it is precarious in its dual invocation. What situates it antagonistically with the world is the persistence that the actors on the block must perform their way out of this liminal violent space, as if their actions were what created its grasps over their non-existence. So Miss Moore carries that weight of the expectation that she will and should teach and act against all things that stand in her way, near her, or are perceived as what should be her concerns. She bears a heavy load.

In "Punk, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" Cathy Cohen calls for a queer politics that is able to account for the aspects of Blackness that are so often displaced in the structure of politics. She asks, "how queer activist understand politically the lives of women (particularly women of color) on welfare, who may fit into the category of heterosexual but whose sexual choices are not perceived as normal, moral, or worthy of state support."[44] What Cohen is calling into focus in a largely non-Black queer political orientation, alternatively emphasizing the fact that some bodies are queered even if their behaviors and self-designations might not explicitly identify them as such. While Cohen makes this argument about "women of color" as general category, the reference to "welfare queens" in the title places specific concern on the production of Black women in a location where identity and categorization diverge. This move brings gender and sexuality into close conversation with one another when Blackness is of concern. Cohen elaborates on this point by expressing a "concern about the current structure and future agenda of queer politics is the challenged assumption of uniform heteronormativity from which all heterosexuals benefit."[45] In order to bring this point into focus Cohen returns to the scene of slavery as the place from which the constitutive elements of sexuality and gender are revealed. What emerges in Cohen's reading of the Black kinship structures under slavery is how Blackness is rendered the quintessential being of sexual deviance enacted through a pathologizing of slave gender performances as inherently nonnormative and thus subject to gratuitous violence. This point brings us back to Bambara and *The Lesson* in which a community seemingly destabilized by capital presents social relations that pervert and mutate the rearrangements of political economy. Yes, "welfare queens" as presented by Cohen, and "the block" as presented by Bambara, are riff with economic violence. Yet Blackness is

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[44] Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, E. Patrick Johnson and Mae Henderson eds., (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 26.
[45] Ibid., 37.

insidiously marked by theoretical escapes as it is swallowed by a class analysis, just as Chow previous tried to subsume Capécia using the same logic, leaving much to be said and explored about what exactly makes these conditions Black and why Blackness is at all meaningful.

Intersecting Assemblages

Recent critiques of the use and functionality of the term intersectionality have begun to circulate widely within cultural and feminist studies scholarship, as it is debated whether intersectionality is or ever has been a viable framework for theorizing modes of domination and power. Intersectionality emerged within academic discourse in the late 1980's in an article published by legal scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw entitled "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," and was further elaborated upon in the subsequent publication by Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." In these articles, Crenshaw specifically examines the inability of law to understand the formation of racialized female bodies as a constitution produced of its own histories and experiential narratives that do not coincide with the legal definition of racial or gender discrimination. Furthermore, Crenshaw argues that feminist theory with its centering of white female oppression and antiracist politics which tends to focus on the plight of Black men, overshadows and mollifies the lived experiences of Black women and other women of color.[46] The critiques launched against intersectionality and the legacy of Crenshaw's work have placed specific focus on the general applicability of the theory because of its specific centering of Black women as the location from which to theorize. It has been argued that

[46] See Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, Kimberlé Crenshaw et al. eds., (New York: New Press, 1995), 357-83 and "Race Reform, Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Anti-Discrimination Law," *Harvard Law Review* 101 (1988): 1331-87.

with "its emphasis on black women's experiences of subjectivity and oppression, intersectional theory has obscured the question of whether all identities are intersectional"[47] and thus questions whether cross-subjective relationality can be drawn from theorize through Black gender.

Intersectionality was developed in the field of Critical Race Theory out of legal necessity to offer domestic violence survivors the ability to file legal claims as both racial and gender subjects. While Crenshaw develops intersectionality using Black women as the initial subjects of the theory, Crenshaw and other scholars have explored its applicability in relation to other women of color. The framework of intersectionality begins and ends with the law, as even the implications it sees fit for activism, inevitably turn back to the law as the place where redress is to be sought and decided. However, the power granted to intersectionality in its critiques that see it as a paradigm shifting theory on identity and subjectivity are far reaching in logic. Crenshaw explains that the scope of her argument "presented intersectionality as a way of framing the various interactions of race and gender in the context of violence against women of color"[48] as "vulgar constructionism thus distorts the possibilities for meaningful identity politics by conflating at least two separate but closely linked manifestations of power."[49] The theoretical framework is most concerned with how acts of violence are responded to after the fact of its occurrence to best locate and identify the needs of the survivor.

The critique of intersectionality launched by Jasbir Puar in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* posits that intersectionality as a theory functions as a handmaiden of the state. This fact is undeniable as any attempt to use the law as remedy to social and political problems upholds the state as the ultimate purveyor of justice. In this respect intersectionality as a theory is indeed shortsighted in assuming the state as separate from and not invested in the misrecognition of subordinate subject categories even when those subjects are seemingly

[47] Jennifer C. Nash, "Re-thinking Intersectionality," *Feminist Review* 89 (2008), 9.
[48] Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins," 374.
[49] Ibid., 375.

incorporated into the dominate schema. However, the formation of intersectionality around the disproportionate levels of violence perpetuated against Black women both by individuals and the state, is not an accidental or inconsequential observation made by Crenshaw. In fact, it is quite profound in the sense that it recognizes and names the victimization of Black woman as deserving a critical inquiry that can thoroughly account for the subjection inherent to the violent production of this attempt at categorization. While Puar is correct in the assertion that intersectionality functions in conjunction with the politics of the state, my contention is that the formulation of the critique posited in *Terrorist Assemblages* is in fact not rooted in a criticism of its aiding of state violence. Instead the issue is much more pernicious and insidious in its calculation. The problem instead can be attribute to the valuation of Black women's suffering as first continuing to exist post-emancipation and post-civil rights as a purely Black constituted violence and secondly with the privileging of Black women, or Black people in general, as possessing a singular victimhood rooted in Blackness.

Jasbir Puar represents an anxious and ambivalent tendency towards Black feminist and Black political genealogies as a potential sight for multivalent theorizations in her push to move beyond intersectionality to what she terms "terrorist assemblages." Employing the term "assemblages" from the work of French post-structuralist theorist Gille Deleuze and his intellectual collaborator, psychoanalytic practitioner Felix Guittari, Puar seeks to challenge the dominate queer progress narratives "of the post-civil rights era" which are argued to be "fatigued debate about the advances and merits of civil legitimation."[50] In contradistinction Puar is interested in a political project "to exhume the *convivial* relations between queerness and militarism, securitization, warm terrorism, surveillance technologies, empire, torture, nationalism, globalization, fundamentalism, secularism, incarceration, detention, deportation, and neoliberalism: the tactics, strategies, and logistics of our

[50] Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), xiv.

contemporary war machines."[51] The question bears asking who does the "our" symbolize in the naming of this contemporary struggle? The formulation of the "our" here harkens back to the forces association of Capécia with a female community in which the theorists did little work to prove she belonged to above and beyond the assumption that feminine pronouns thus demarcate female communality. Puar is attempting to bring the post-civil rights subject, into purview with a presumed common struggle with other subjects of "queer times."

Puar posits a reformulated radical queer subjectivity as a counter and corrective logic to Black feminism and Black political tactics more broadly. Staging a critique against formulations of intersectionality, Puar asserts:

> For while intersectionality and its underpinnings – an unrelenting epistemological will to truth – presupposes identity and thus disavows futurity, or, perhaps more accurately, prematurely anticipates and thus fixes a permanence to forever, assemblage, in its debt to ontology and its espousal of what cannot be known, seen, or heard, or has yet to known, seen, or heard, allows for becoming beyond or without being.[52]

While intersectionality is a broad encompassing theory, its underpinnings as alluded to in this passage, are again realized in the bodies of Black women, as the subjects of Black feminism, who come to stand in as Puar's unspoken opponents. By assertion critical theory as the genealogy, which Puar is, writing into, like critics of Fanon, have already made an objective determination about where gender that is Black specifically stands in relationship to narratives of liberation and that relationship is theorized into obsolescence. That is to say while the intellectual labor performed in *Terrorist Assemblages* is insidious and exemplary in its own right, in displaying the contentious relationship

[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid., 216.

between radical politics and Blackness, it is not exhaustive in its task. The formulation of the terrorist assemblage brings to the forefront an insistent framework, that disavows Black articulations of suffering at the same time as it posits a new revolutionary subjectivity that is in theory more dynamic than Blackness. The concept of "*Blackfemmephobia*" articulated by Sharpely-Whiting as indicative of the impulses of Capécia's writing, is structurally linked to the conceptual maneuver Puar makes in arguing that the underpinnings of intersectionality, Black feminists, disavow futurity through a supposed reliance on the permanence of what is termed "identity," crowding out the possibilities of being and becoming, politically, those things that are simply unknown.

By drawing out what undergirds the push to "re-think" intersectionality, this argument is not insisting on a strident recuperation of its modes of theorizing and its premises for defining systems of oppression, as an oppositional strategy to the terrorist assemblage. Instead I am most concerned with why it is assumed that theory emerging out of a Black gendered space has nothing to offer the political orientations of those situated seemingly outside of the bounds of Blackness. What is it about Black gender that disallows theory to sit within the optimism of positivist reinvisionings of subjectivity? My contention is that, these newly emerged theories makes very visible old standing relations of power that exist between Blackness and the theoretical mobility of other subjects. This tendency demonstrates the manner in which theorists that attempt to problematize Black subject theories as demonstrating an unrelenting focus on objective relations of power, also in the same breath use Black bodies as objective proof to support their claims, and thus reify why theories of objectification continue to centrally figure in critical Black theory. The question that demands engagement is, why then are we confronted with the figure of the Black woman, why is this trope called upon?

The declaration by Sylvia Wynter that "Black women's struggle is quite other,"[53] highlights paradoxes inherent in the constitution of Black gender. What is situated at the crux of Blackness and gender, represented in the Black female condition, is the inability for Blackness to emerge through articulation. Articulation is defined as "the act of giving utterance or expression" and also "the action or manner of jointing or interrelating."[54] The particularity of violence inherent to the structural position of Black gender cannot arise into thought and struggles to stay afloat in theory. Intersectionality as a political project is responding to this social reality. Black women do not emerge as subjects through either Blackness or through gender as political frameworks. There is an interrelation between that of Blackness and gender that disallows a comprehensive utterance of what it means to *be* a Black woman. The categorization of *being* in this respect is overdetermined by what it means to possess a race and inhabit gender. Though the terms of engagement are not befitting given that the Black does not possess race, it is accumulated and made fungible, nor does it inhabit gender, it exceeds it and predetermines what the very meaning of gender, categorization, and recognition is in Human terms. As Wynter makes clear, "'race' is a code word for 'genre',"[55] making both race and gender a product of the Human project, though Blackness as a paradigmatic structure is neither product nor other of Man, but a position of *non-being.*

The reading of genre, provided by Sylvia Wynter, problematizes the theoretical grounds upon which feminist and Marxist projects employ distinction to theorize relations of power and suffering at the level of subject constitution. With respect to the implementation of moral and political laws in the Greek polis, Wynter writes

[53] Sylvia Wynter, "Proud Flesh Inter/views: Sylvia Wynter." *Proud Flesh: New Afrikan Journal of Culture, Politics & Consciousness* no. 4 (2006): 25.
[54] "Articulation," in *Merriam-Webster.com.* Retrieved February 7, 2016, from http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/articulation
[55] Ibid., 24.

> …the biocentric descriptive statement that is instituting of our present mode of sociogeny, the way we at present normatively know Self, Other, and social World is no less adaptively true as the condition of the continued production and reproduction of such a genre of being human and of its order as, before the revolution initiated by the Renaissance humanists, and given the then theocentric descriptive statement that had been instituting of the mode of sociogeny of medieval Latin-Christian Europe, its subjects had normatively known Self, Other, as well as their social, physical, and organic worlds, in the adaptively true terms needed for the production and reproduction not only of their then supernaturally legitimated genre of being human, but as well for that of the hierarchical social structures in whose intersubjective field that genre of the human could have alone realized itself.[56]

The point here is key, while this order of being is inherent to a Greco-Roman constitution, the formative political system to the function of politics in Western modernity, it is also simultaneously Judeo-Christian, of Renaissance Humanism, and also Medieval. The "epochal ruptures" that announce these various shifts in time do not destabilize what situates the conception of being itself, whether spirit/flesh or self/other, Man and the production of the Human is omnipresent throughout. Thus the modern notion of Man, produced by the Western configuration of what it means to be, is marked by genre. Distinction, reinvention, reclamation, and dissociation are the modus operandi of Man. While it has been argued, through the Culture Studies theoretical model, that modernity has marked Man through male gendered bourgeoisie whiteness, Judeo-Christianity, heterosexuality and, patriarchy this only represents one theoretical rendering of a broader form. I argue, with respect to Wynter, that this stagnated representation locks Man into a singularity, when

[56] Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation--An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3.3 (2003): 272.

in fact Man is plural it is all things that contend expressively with Human knowledge. Man encapsulates a social order that grants credence to being in positivity and in suffering, a power of recognition and announcement.

What Wynter troubles is the concept that Man, as an overrepresentation of the human, is produced of the singular constitution, so profoundly heralded by Cultural Studies and by the political focus on White supremacy as the essential structural arraignment necessitating another world. Furthermore she radically disrupts the insistence that the articulation of genre distinctions is produced separately and in opposition to the structure of "Man." In fact, she argues "'genre' and 'gender' come from the same root," and as such they are representative of "Man" because "there cannot be only one mode of being human; there are a multiplicity of modes."[57] The process of articulating a place within a structuring order, whether as liberated or suffering subject, is emblematic of Man as the multiplicity of all being. In this respect distinction and kind function as the "ontogeny" and "sociogeny" of "Man" as the overrepresented human, not as the antithesis to this process of production. As such what genre, and by extension the assumptive logic of feminism and Marxism, produces is in fact not distinction at the level of the constitution of Man, but instead a performance of distinction that fortifies the continuation of the Western episteme.

Contrary to Man, Blackness is unable to articulate itself into genre and the exposure of this paradigm of exclusion sits at the nexus of violence that engenders Black gender, returning us to the previous points by Cohen that place slavery and kinship into tension. Rather than approaching Blackness as a racial category, it instead should be approached as a paradigm predicated on dissociation. Blackness must be theorized *as* class, gender, and sexuality as opposed to attempting to think Blackness *through* class, gender, and sexuality. Blackness in its constitution is distinction. However, the differentiation is produced through a totalizing violence that merges and

[57] Wynter, "Proud Flesh Inter/views: Sylvia Wynter," 24.

overdetermines difference as sameness. Hence why Blackness is invoked as matter-of-fact when it encapsulates vast plurality. Through slavery, singularity is inscribed onto Blackness "in order to deny, displace, and minimize the violence of slavery."[58] What is granted precedent over variation amongst slaves is the paradigm of submission of all slaves to the will of the master. As such it matters not what the slave is in difference but that the slave is a slave in a singular relationship to all that the master can be, raced, gendered, classed, and sexually. As Saidiya Hartman argues in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America,* "what is striking here are the myriad and nefarious uses of slave property and the ways in which slaves become the property of all whites, given their status in civil society."[59] My suggestion to think Blackness as in contradistinction to thinking through arbitrary categories of difference, is to suggest that genre discourse only manifests through the violent relation that produces Blackness as structurally silenced in response to every mode of being. This condition is bore of slavery.

This point moves us back to Puar, who is being given so such intense focus here because of the reception and radical political heralding of the terrorist assemblage, which I contend is Black*femme*phobic. While 9/11 spelled out an epochal rupture in the constitution of race, with respect to the social and political configuration of Eurasia and its relationship to the world, the shift morphed and intensified the regime of violence launched against and at Brown bodies, however the production of the terrorist as trope did not replace nor disrupt the violent strictures of Blackness. Though Venus always performs in at least two acts,[60] the Black*femme*phobia at the root of the terrorist assemblage is not solely tether against the failure of intersectionality to articulate Black women and their liberation as explicitly anti-state thus anti-incorporation. What sutures it is such

[58] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 25.
[59] Ibid., 24.
[60] See Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 26, (June 2008), 1-14.

articulation cannot occur given the status of Black gender as absent hyper-presence and also its position as what fortifies the inauguration of the announcement of different and exceptional modes of distinctly non-Black subjectivities. The context of terrorist assemblages is ignited by Man and its structural obligation to proliferate through distinction. The designation as a radical subjectivity that rhizomatically resists and disintegrates hegemony does not bar it from being productive to newly formed hegemonic structures that maintain Man as a structural predicate to Blackness.

By opening queerness to logics of power that are not specifically tethered to race, gender, class, nor the strictures of sexuality, Puar is attempting relinquish queerness from an identitiarian model of theorizing oppression. Arguing through affect theory that, "we must encourage genealogies of sexuality that suspend, for a moment, the rubrics of desire, pleasure, erotics, and identity that typically suspend 'sex acts,' yet simultaneously avoid collapsing sexuality into a thin biopolitical frame of reproduction, hetero or homo."[61] While race, which is conflated with identity in this analysis, cannot be rejected completely in a model that centers affective queerness in the post 9/11 political times, Puar instead employs 'off-white' theories of races, drawing specifically on the performance theory work of Jose Muñoz, to point to "affect as always already within signification, within narrative, function as a form of critical resistance to dominant modes of being and becoming."[62] However the constellation of queer off-whiteness, or queer racelessness to draw on Sharpley-Whiting, a racial yet non-racial categorization functions specifically through antiblackness that disallowed the Black such a claim to fluidity in the manner in which racial groups, white and non-white, had been afforded.

In addition, it also charges Blackness with violating the freedom of other subjects because of its strict racial demarcation. As Jared Sexton argues in *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the*

[61] Puar, Terrorist Assemblages, 211.
[62] Ibid., 208.

Critique of Multiracialism, which provides a crucial commentary on multiracial politics, "Blacks are thus depicted in the multiracial imagination as a conglomerate anachronism, perpetuating disreputable traits of antebellum slave society and presenting a foremost obstacle to the progress of liberal society."[63] While the terrorist assemblage is not a "liberal" theory per se and has more radical leanings, thought this assertion by Sexton still reveals itself in this respect. Again this conflates structural categorization with self-naming and employs race to suggest that it is a conscious political choice of alignment, while failing to account for the violence that is inherent in race regardless of how one choices to perform it. Furthermore, what is assumed is that Blackness is absent of movement within and is a stagnant social category that is simply an identity choice not a necessity of condition. Thus Blackness in this purview can by choice ascribe itself to off-whiteness to open up possibility for transformation but such a suggested gesture misunderstands the violent history that produced and continues to produce Black exclusion from the arena of racial ambiguity.

Queerness thus forges a political off-white post-Blackness, "not an identity nor an anti-identity, but an assemblage that is spatially and temporally contingent" that "refuses the continuity between self and other."[64] As a theorem, to be queer is to "affective, ontological, and [an] assemblage paradigm [that] challenges the limits of identity based narratives of queerness, especially those reliant on visibility politics."[65] This departure from Blackness also assumes a more crucial misunderstanding that misaligns the relationship between queerness and Blackness. The anchoring of terrorist assemblages in a distance from Black politics holds that there is no essential relationship between queerness and Blackness, and that queerness is a new modality separate from the ways Blackness has been configured within the social structure as presumably an identity not ontology.

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[63] Jared Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 36.
[64] Puar, Terrorist Assemblages, 204-5.
[65] Ibid., xxvii.

Demonstrating this in the separation of the assemblage from intersectionality, Puar argues, "Intersectionality privileges naming, visuality, epistemology, representation, and meaning, while assemblage underscores feeling, tactility, ontology, affect, and information,"[66] thus aligning traits with the assemblage that privileges truth over the perceptions and beliefs that undergird the terms associated with intersectionality. The relationship between these superficial terms associated with intersectionality and the school of thought most responsible for its production is reveal more clearly in later works presented by Puar to further explain the contention relationship the terrorist assemblage holds with intersectional models of existing.

In "'I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess' Intersectionality, Assemblage, and Affective Politics," the relationship between queerness, Blackness, and intersectionality is supplemented with several précis about the formulation of the project. This paper if framed as a response to criticisms that the departure from intersectionality that Puar vouched for was in some ways unclear. As such Puar reformulates the issues with how intersectional framework proliferates after its emergence, by stating,

> Pedagogically, since the emergence and consolidation of intersectionality from the 1980s on, it has been deployed more forcefully as a feminist intervention to disrupt whiteness and less so as a critical race intervention to disrupt masculinist frames. Thus, precisely in the act of performing this intervention, what is also produced is an ironic reification of sexual difference as a/the foundational one that needs to be disrupted. Sexual and gender difference is understood as the constant from which there are variants, just as women of color are constructed in dominant feminist generational narratives as the newest arrivals

[66] Ibid., 215.

among the subjects of feminism. This pedagogical deployment has had the effect of re-securing the centrality of the subject positioning of white women.[67]

The problems inherent in the articulation of and political allegiance to an intersectional framework are identifying by three central conceptual flaws. First, that sexual difference functions as a pillar of distinction, secondly while intersectionality claims to represent all it simultaneously deflates and overinflates the significance of certain subjects over others, and most crucially that Black women dominate the framing of all women of color. As such these problems allow for Black feminist genealogies, in Puar's calculation, to privilege themselves in manners that adhere and also do not adhere to intersectional models. And furthermore, supports a Black feminist "insistence that an interest in exploring other frames, for example assemblages, gets rendered as problematic and even produced WOC feminist invested in other genealogies as 'race traitors.'"[68] There is no illustration of how this name blaming occurs yet Puar goes on to state that the Black feminist use of intersectionality also provides support to white feminist racism. Citing Malini Joshar Schueller to state, "that most scholarship on WOC is produced by WOC, while many white feminists, although hailing intersectionality as primary methodological rubric continue to take gender difference as foundational."[69] Thus Black feminism opens the door for white feminists to continue using gender as the primary mode of analysis while using intersectional logics to evade racial and other modes of difference.

The lingering traces of Blackness apparent in *Terrorist Assemblages* explicitly emerge here. What is at play in this calculation is a grotesque misalignment of power. It is grotesque in the sense that it participates in disfiguring the structure of Blackness. As descriptive theories labor to

[67] Jasbir Puar, ""I would Rather Be a Cyborg than a Goddess": Becoming-Intersection in Assemblage Theory," *Philoshia* 2, no. 1 (2012): 52.
[68] Ibid., 53
[69] Ibid.

apprehend the constitutive relationship between Black gender and violence, the response identifies the description as the cause. Black feminists are thus accused of producing a condition so confining it infringes on the radical freedoms of others, rather than seeing this condition as that which Black gender is confined to. The theory Puar is producing stabilizes itself through the assumption that Blackness is, as it appears, objective and thus already always dealt with, manageable, and disposal. This performance of accusation by way of assertion, brings to the forefront an anxious disregard of Black specific theorizing, by identifying it as forceful and oppressive thinking that clouds the theoretical possibility of other marginalized subjects and upholds the already privileged white and Black paradigm. As Sexton argues it comes to be asserted without inquest that "Blacks have *inverted* racial hierarchy – or *reversed* racism – to the categorical disadvantage,"[70] of other racial groups. No emphasis is placed on why Black feminist theory centers attention on racial *and* sexual different, and again fault is attributed to Black feminism for holding firm to something that assumedly no longer structurally exist in a distinct and substantive manner. Yet and still, there is no counterevidence provided to show how Black women are constituted otherwise.

The shortsighted nature of this position is that to make a critical departure, the anchoring claim situates itself against something that is structurally destabilized and silenced in arguing, without concerted force, its opposition. Theory cannot be post-Blackness without Blackness, as there is an essential quality to Blackness that allows for such claims to register as possibilities. Without explication Puar succeeds in developing a new theory of queer liberation by employing Blackness in its overdetermination, all without illustrating how and if Blackness and queerness are distinctive political organizations. As Sharon Holland argues in *The Erotic Life of Racism* "the erotics of the old Black/white binary we understand not only racism but potentially our erotic selves."[71] While Puar

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[70] Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes*, 36.
[71] Sharon Patricia Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism*, (Durham: Duke UP, 2012), 14.

might like to assert the application of queerness to the terrorist assemblage rejects the understanding that queer is constitutive with sex, as an analytic tool it cannot be disarticulated from its historical emergence as a term that has been used to mark non-heteronormative sexual and non-sexual behaviors vis-à-vis Cohen. Thus the forceful nature in which Blackness is evacuated for queer modalities misrecognizes that Black and queer genealogies have an inexplicable history. Puar is upholding this claim through an assumption that a connection must be forged where one is not already. And also, that queerness offers Blackness a quality that the reverse pairing does not offer.

The push by Puar to force Blackness to come to terms with queerness is a political misnomer. Viewing these categories as distinctive associations, does not take into consideration what has been done with non-heteronormalized Black sex 'before' and prescribes correctives under the auspices of radical political change that employ technologies of classification that are genealogically rooted in Black suffering. When gender and sexuality are not theorized through Blackness, there constitution is assumed as not inherent of being and thus discourse functions to dislodge the subject from the perception of essential structuring, by arguing that they are in fact mutable. However, Blackness reveals that the freedom, will, and ability to find possibility in gender and sexuality are produced only through beings that exist in contradistinction to Blackness. Gratuitous violence cripples the ability of truth to emerge through Black distinction making it a structurally unclear just how the Black suffers.

Hortense Spillers offer a precise and critical theorization of how the sexual violations born onto the Black female body under the domination of slavery, produces a deadening political silence around its occurrence. Spillers locates this economy within 'an American grammar book,' that demarcates a violating relation to the Black gendered body, that through the application of its grammar functions as a logic that does not speak or reveal its maneuvers or motivations. A

condition so totalizing that the evidence to prove its existence as complete domination and the 'counter-evidence,' its chartable acts of resistance, are without proof that allow them to be imagined as a systematized occurrence. The logbooks kept by slave ship captains and crew members along the voyages of the middle passage render for Spillers that, "the sexual violation of the captive females and their own express rage against their oppressors did not constitute events that captains and their crews rushed to record in letters to their sponsoring companies, or sons on board in letters home to their New England mama."[72] Acts of sexual aggression and domination in this respect located themselves within an economy of silence, from which actions of intent and responses to pain were made undetectable. What happened to the body, in materiality and theory, as a result of this economy of violence – that produced racial slavery as a global system and race a trans-global apparatus of power and domination – forced dispersals of injury into spaces, temporalities, and realms in manners that persist in maintaining the silence of how the unbridle access of the Black female body as raw material acts as the condition of possibility for a host of other racially gendered and sexualized violences to unfold.

As illustrated through a reinvigoration of the work of psychoanalytic theorist David Marriott, Zakiyyah Jackson argues that the discursive functioning of gender and sexuality hold out a peculiar relationship with Blackness one established through the formulations of Blackness as an ontological category and not as an identity, predicated on political choice as Puar argues. Jackson critically argues, "The violence that produces Blackness necessitates that from the existential vantage point of Black lived experience, gender and sexuality lose their coherence as normative categories."[73] This point speaks directly to Puar's inability to account for Black feminist protocols in the terrorist

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[72] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," in *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003), 73.
[73] Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, "Waking Nightmares – On David Marriott," *Social Text* 17, no. 2-3 (2011): 359.

assemblage. Black feminism as a political project deforms genre, it is in essences the unmaking of genre subjectivities. For Puar queerness is a choice association tether to gender and sex or not, however what Jackson reveals is that such choice of association is not granted to Blackness, or the Black lived experience, as a choice of association or disassociation. Jackson goes on to point to Blackness as the "absolute index of otherness" where subjectivity is concerned and states, "While particular nonblack sexual and gendered practices may be queered, Blackness serves as an essential template of gendered and sexual 'deviance' that is limited to the negation not of a particular practice but of a state of being."[74] Blackness is always already gendered and sexually situated and to assume it as not critically misunderstand the manner in which Blackness enters coherence not through race but as a contrapuntal position to existence itself. Thus the instance by Puar that queer times are post-Black times (post-civil rights) miscalculates the fact that Blackness queers time, it destabilizes modes of existence assumed as stable, instable, immutable, and mutable. This is not by way of choice but through violence that applies itself to Black life in theory and in thought as if Blackness requires no further explication or theoretical engagement.

Blackness finds itself cast in politics time and time again as the example from which to draw on but from which generative political possibility is assumed to no longer exist. Puar is exemplary of this response to Blackness in theory however does not represent the totality of this maneuver. Continual and ongoing access to Blackness creates the conditions of possibility for new arising political subjectivities to form as they access Blackness in objectifying ways to tether and suture critiques. This manifestation is authorized through the specific historical and continued relationship between Blackness and (un) gendering violence that functions as an authorizing mode of access, producing structural, material, and theoretical entrances into Blackness as the subject which any and everyone can interject upon without the necessity of proven authorization. Just as Capécia's

[74] Ibid., 359-60.

protagonists marked themselves as worthy life subjects against the inability of Black women to do the same, speaking for them through the register of distain, the terrorist assemblage is able to take flight by staging a critique against a seemingly defenseless Blackness. In its presentation this position assumes Black gender as devoid of a history and condition of suffering that is particular in its production and continuously prevailing in its fervor. This arrangement is the afterlife of capture and sexual violence as a paradigmatic arrangement, that is to say it is the afterlife of slavery. This is Miss Moore's lesson.

The Claim of Right to Property: Social Violence and Political Right

> Generally, property is divided into two major areas: realty and personalty. Realty is land, whereas personalty is possessions—for instance, jewelry, money, furniture, or (formerly) slaves.
>
> – Law Library of Congress

> "I said am I a slave?"
> "Yes." …
> "But I'm supposed to be free. I was free. Born Free!"
>
> – Octavia Butler, *Kindred*

Dana, the Black female protagonist, in *Kindred* by Octavia Butler, is driven by an anxious desire to vindicate her ancestors, who are white and Black, from the hold of property relations. Making several returns from the 1970s to the nineteenth century antebellum South, Dana is guarded by a political imaginary of slavery, from its afterlife, that leads her to make many assumptions about how power is situated amongst actors in history. *Kindred* represents the Black future's forceful engagement with the Black past. It is a future return that destabilizes conjectures about the structures of violence that conditioned slavery and the present assumptions carried by Dana about the possibilities of the past. She finds herself confronted with the stark reality that not only is she unable to change the violence of the past, which is necessary to produce her existence, but she is also mobilized against her will to partake in the brutalization of her Black ancestors.

Her return to the slaveholding south is channeled by the distressed calls to her by Rufus Weylin, her white slaveholding ancestor. Even though she arrives from the future, Rufus sees her before she sees him recognizing her as a slave before she realizes that reality of herself. Recalling Dana's first visit when she saved Rufus from drowning he recounts, "In the river. I was walking in the water there was a hole. I fell, and then couldn't find the bottom anymore. I saw you in a room."[1] After this revelation, Dana soon acknowledges the cause of her returns stating, "The boy was the focus of my travels – perhaps the cause of them. He had seen me in my living room before I was

[1] Octavia E. Butler, *Kindred* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 22.

drawn to him… I had seen nothing at all, felt nothing but sickness and disorientation."[2] Rufus's claim proceeds and exceeds her arrival, her recognition that her body is being called upon and her understanding of what exactly she is being commanded to perform.

Dana initially believes that her family history encompasses a heteronormative multiracial union between Rufus and Alice Greenwood, a Black woman. Upon learning that Alice was born of a free mother, making her free as well, Dana is curious and intrigued to discover how the course of history brings Rufus and Alice together in a voluntary union. Her curiosity for validation sparked by her own familial kinship and also by her marriage to Kevin Franklin, a white man. The assumption Dana holds about how Rufus and Alice come to bear children with one another is violently disrupted. Alice chose to marry a slave, Isaac Jackson, owned by the Weylin family. And after Rufus attempts to rape Alice, which fails only because Isaac stepped in the fight Rufus off, Alice and Isaac are forced to flee and are later caught and sold. Isaac sold to a plantation further south and Alice sold to the Weylin family. Selling her into slavery punished her crime of aiding a fugitive slave. Her worth to Rufus out measured her assessed value by others as he proclaimed, "I had to pay near twice what's she worth to get her. That's all the money I had, and Daddy won't pay for a doctor to fix niggers. Doc knows that."[3] Dana then assuming the role of doctoring Alice to health, as she had been eaten by dogs and dragged behind a wagon attempting to escape the person who now owned her.

The close proximity Alice now has to Rufus, the person she told Dana on more than one occasion "wanted to be more friendly than [she] did,"[4] did not alarm Dana in any fundamental way. While she is aware that Alice had been hurt as a result of Rufus, she is without foresight in seeing that the violence would not subside and would now forcefully control every aspect of Alice's daily

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[2] Ibid., 24.
[3] Ibid., 147.
[4] Ibid., 120.

life on the Weylin plantation. Once Dana nurses Alice back to health, Rufus sends Dana to retrieve Alice to bring her into his bedroom. Alice is continuously raped by Rufus, bearing a few children who die, while two survive, one being Dana's direct ancestor. Dana's consent to the violence against Alice, need not be intentional, willful, or desirable, but came along through the mundane functioning of everyday. The role Dana labors within on the plantation, places her in a relationship to violence and rape that not only produces vulnerability for Alice but also for Dana. In order for Dana to be born she is forced to accept, without the consideration of her will, that absolute violence is what makes her existence in the future possible.

Throughout this journey Dana is not compelled to view herself as a captive being. In her reality, she just happens on a time and space elsewhere. Her physical abuse at the hands of the Weylin family does not lead her to consider that she too might be held captive in the same respect as the slaves documented as the propertied possessions of the Weylin family. The return of Kevin, her husband, with her to the nineteenth century, does not propel her to consider the fundamental distinctions in their subject positions, as white and Black. He, unlike her, is able to sustain himself and move around more freely, traveling from Maryland as north as Maine, in the course of one visit, lasting longer than any of her visits combined. While he ages during this time and sustains an injury to his forehead that left a permanent scar, the past is in no way congruently violent to the both of them. Dana exists within direct proximity to the Weylin plantation and suffers through whippings, attempted rapes, the performance of unpaid labor, and coercion into being an accessory to many acts of violence.

It is only Alice, the figure who embodies the precarious status of once being free and then a slave, who forces Dana to consider questions about slavery and freedom that no other figure compels her to do. Sitting before one another neither of the women consider themselves a slave. Alice asks Dana "…what's it like to be a slave," after a deliberate pause Dana replies, "I don't

know." Alice confused by her response saying further, "How could you not know what it's like to be a slave. You are one."[5] Dana then reveals to Alice that she was once free prompting Alice to advise her "And you let yourself be a slave? You should run away."[6] But running away had had the reverse effect on Alice, offering no absolute promise of freedom on the other side. Alice, performing the role as ancestor, and Dana, the role of descendent, confined to the same plantation, claimed by the same master, and not separated by space or time. To Alice death is better than slavery and when Dana prompts her to stay alive, Alice comes to the belated realization that she might also be a slave, demanding that Dana tell her if she is indeed a slave. Dana answered with a simple "yes." Infuriated with Dana for saving her life she yells and curses that Dana should have let her die. However, Dana did not have the purchase over her life to decide is she lived or died. Dana's desire to survive to see the future, to return to 1976, and escape the past was necessitated by an absolute submission as a Black woman before the law of slavery.

Kindred stages a world of degrading violence produced and maintained through coercive and dominating social measures. When the lives situated within the claws of this social violence come before the public to claim rights within the human condition, it is not recognized and it cannot be proven that any violence against the body has occurred that demands the protection of (right to) rights. The violence is purely social, in that privacy is not an available security to those who are maimed, whipped, raped, kidnapped, and killed by the metaphysical violence of being held as property. As *Kindred* begins, the prologue confronts the reader with Dana, who is disfigured in a hospital room attempting to vouch for her injuries, her claims are incoherent even as her husband Kevin tries to testify on her behalf. What has happened to her is not legible. She is missing an arm but how, if her injury is absent of a physically present attacker. Her injuries are sustained of a metaphysical attacker that cannot be rationally named. Her disfiguration only finds its way into the

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[5] Ibid., 156.
[6] Ibid., 157.

focus of the reader in the subsequent chapters which illustrated an endless array of socially decayed existence inhabited by a range of Black lives, captive, free, formerly free, and emancipated. However, the prologue is just an addendum to the story and the recognition granted within it sits tertiary, tangential, and inessential to the violence that allowed Dana to emerge. The recognition of violence for property, is neither essential nor an operative component of its conditions, which by its structure leaves a paradigm of violence unearthed.

Blackness as the Problem of Political Theory

There is an unspoken logic that sutures the entrance of subjects into political discourse. Theoretical approaches to political structures often assume a neutral subject for which violent apparatuses are applied, while resisting critiques of violence that articulate the locus of violence within the particular formation of a singular subject position. The merger of theory and politics converges upon the subject as a preconstituted intelligibility born into freedom which violence becomes a later sensibility for within the world. However, when confronted with a subjectivity that is produced of violence and further atomized through subsequent applications of violences that are not easily affixed to a singular structure of force and domination, contemporary political theory performs a conceptual denial that refutes the possibility that such a paradigm could exist.

The eighteenth and nineteenth century instutionalization of the human as an "object of science" for Michel Foucault must be understood as "an event in the order of knowledge," and not as an evolutionary progression of man.[7] The production of man, a choice term for Foucault, as the *a fortiori* principle from which all human knowledge establishes itself, arises through the appearance of man as the "empirico-transcendental being" bestowed with the knowledge/power to mediate the depths of the unthought. Furthermore, this configuration allows for man/human to exit the

[7] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things,* trans. Robert Hurley, (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 345.

philosophical realm, emerging in empiricism, the social and political realms, as a neutral political subject whose ontological constitution is assumed as apolitical. This appearance positions the subject politically as inhabiting the space "of being always cut off from an origin which is promised to him in the immediacy of the return" which "gave the human sciences their particular form."[8] While the "epistemological field traversed by the human sciences was not laid down in advance"[9] it is through the possession of language that this subject "can constitute a whole symbolic universe for himself, within which he has a relation to his past, to things, to other men, and on the basis of which he is able equally to build something like a body of knowledge."[10] Even as the human subject enters the human sciences as an object that in theory is without a preconstituted value, as value can only be determined in theory through the application of human scientific methods, its ability to know "what life is" as an external knowledge to the constitution of self creates the conditions of possibility for the repetition of its life order infinitely. Furthermore, it also elucidates the perfunctory nature with which the human sciences are a product of a political grammar of human existence.

The political subjectivity of the human can emerge within each enunciation of human scientific inquiry, which "interlock and can always be used to interpret one another" however this logical interconnectivity across and between fields is not essential to render the human and its conflicts visible. While the human can exist in the human sciences as a subject with or without a specific focus on its political conflict, this rule of theoretical engagement is not without a structural antithesis. Contrarily to the scientific position held by the human, the Black *must* traverse the terrain of all fields within the human sciences in order to think the sheer magnitude and gravity of its condition. However, such a task proves impossible when it is taken seriously that the relationship between Blackness and the human sciences is one not inhabited like its quintessential political

[8] Ibid., 350.
[9] Ibid., 344
[10] Ibid., 351

subject, the human, as self-imposed object, but is structured as a static theorem through forced objectification. That is, as the human finds sites within knowledge that vindicate it from an object status through the valuation of its "positivity (living, speaking, labouring being),"[11] Blackness is unable to labor to produce a singular scientific inquiry that can first, render a positivity of Blackness exist stably, and secondly, that such positivity has the right to exist free of externally imposed violence.

Theories of Blackness, in attempts to render a whole theorization of a problematic, always produce a gap or a caesura in logic. The process of accounting for a singular aspect of Black existence, whether political, social, or economic, discovers that the findings of the scientific inquiries are unable to render Blackness *a fortiori*. The methodological expressions that are essential to the configuration of thought as a scientific measure that (re)produces the human and its relation to his positivity as a natural product of existence infinitely thereover, cannot locate Blackness in this realm. As Foucault argues that man enters discursively into the eighteenth and nineteenth century advent of the human sciences shedding all *a priori* knowledge of self to discover the individual and the group anew, the *a priori* markings that emerged Blackness as a conceptualization of being cannot divorce itself from the very forces from which it was produced. Simply stated, the process of thinking Blackness is always preconditioned by violence. Further to this point, these symbolic inscriptions that mark the Black body through violence, the hieroglyphics markings that adorn the flesh,[12] function as the locus that propels Blackness into theory. It is from the space of violence that the Black is thought, it is through theory that this violence attempts recourse (either through justification, disavowal, or description), and it is from the space of thinking that it is determined just what, if anything, should or can be done.

[11] Ibid., 353.

[12] See Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," in *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003), 203-229.

Blackness as theory and as materiality constitutes two separate and essential scales that structure this paradigm. The two are not disarticulatable yet must be understood as distinct converging logics. Applications of theory over Blackness provide the conditions of possibility for the acting out of material violence, while the visuality of material violence also work to suture theories of Blackness. However, an intentional repositioning of the relationship of knowledge to theory does not remove or displace the material violences. The violence exists in the very gesture of asking, what is to be done with the Black, a haunting question that undergirds discursive relations. That something must be done harkens back to a causal injury from which the necessity of thought arises. This causal relation, I argue, is not a singular event or institution, but is instead a paradigm from which baselessness constructs the position Blackness inhabits within modernity. Thus slavery becomes a grand scale productive economy of the capturing of Black bodies, not solely through the designation of Black as slave, but more crucially because modernity produced no "evidence" otherwise as proof that the Black could be essentially in structural form anything else. While all Black bodies were not seized into the material bounds of slave capture, theoretically all Black bodies were subject to its captivity via social and political violences.

In this respect, capture does not necessitate a physical manifestation for the designation of such a laden theoretical status to have a material consequence over the body. The captivity occurs through the structured inability of Blackness to prove undoubtedly using the power of reason what it is, in the same manner in which the human is able to bestow recognition and redress upon itself. Furthermore, this capture allows theories of generalized subject violence to obscure the relationship between Blackness and proliferation of particular forms of subject violence, such as slavery. In doing so, Blackness becomes an inessential calculus in what is assumed as the essential machinations of violence against subjects, leaving Blackness veiled as just another victim of a problem and not appropriately as the central logic to its deployment. As the human scientific register is employed to

reorient the relationship of Blackness in theory to antiblack violence, what is produced in defense of its centrality to this paradigm are simply cases of Blackness.[13] All that appears in these attempts are culminations of episodic revelations that struggle to find facts in time to sustain Black claims towards a position of singularity within theorizations of political structures.

In *The Human Condition* Hannah Arendt performs the theoretical maneuver of excavating the human politically, by marking its political corruption as result of violent shifts in its world and not as the constitution of its ontological essence. As such Arendt is concerned with the manner in which the private and public realms of human life have become indistinguishably linked by what she terms "the rise of the social." The process of bringing the public into the private has emerged a condition where action, a privileged state of political movement in political theory, has been displaced by social behavior, which is geared towards the proliferation of the social at the expense of the political, as the standard of all life. Action, following work and labor as the final stage in Arendtian teleos of human activity, is an irreversible political measure, "the process of no return,"[14] and emerges strictly within the public as opposition to the social subsumption of politics. Political action is made possible by the *vita activa* a form of life that is situated in contradistinction to the *vita contemplativa*, which Arendt argues most political theory holds a biased imposition towards. However, in her calculations the *vita activa* is an under theorized, "admittedly extreme," and perhaps more pressingly necessary place for politics to take root.

The *vita activa* has referential semblances with the Greek *polis* and the Roman *res publica* however it is distinctive in its modern instantiation. Arendt argues that unlike the privacy achieved in the Greek *Oikos* and the temporary privacy enjoyed away from the *res publica* in Roman society, modern privacy finds itself subsumed within individualism, defined as a corruption of the heart that

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[13] For more on the reference to "cases of Blackness" see Fred Moten, "The Case of Blackness," *Criticism* 50, no. 2 (2009): 177-218.
[14] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 231.

has no "tangible place in the world."[15] The private has a direct link to the social order, "no longer formed by the royal household of an absolute ruler" and although it has "lost its personality" has not lost the ability to rule.[16] The rise of the social sets forth a condition where society "embraces and controls all members of a given community equally and with equal strength."[17] The early stages of this condition are representative in the proliferation of economics. However Arendt makes a clear departure from Marx in asserting that the "behavioral sciences," in its production of social behaviors, developed further the social controls that economics once imposed, "…only on sections of the population and on parts of their activities,"[18] making economic freedom not the central necessity but one of many revolutions that must occur in the world. The advanced development of this paradigm seizes control of all sectors of life, wielding a further dispersed and differentiated invisible hand of power than what can been seen in the Marxian respect as being contained within divisions and subdivisions of classes.

Arendt frequently returns to examples of the Greek and Roman slave in attempts to demonstrate the stratifications of ancient societies that are lost in modernity. What is not apparent in these assessments, and what could be viewed as a striking omission, are mediations on the status of the modern slave. The absence of the modern slave is ever present amongst the girth of references to slavery represented throughout the text. In light of this, a simple assumption could assert that without a direct mention of modern slavery, Arendt has not registered a need to consider the slave as figuring centrally within the production of the modern human condition. However, it would be too hasty to make such a claim without first giving attention to where and how the ancient slave labors in support of the overarching theory on the form and function of past societies. The political nostalgia shown for the yester eras of antiquity are visible in the argued necessity for a movement

[15] Ibid., 39.
[16] Ibid., 40.
[17] Ibid., 41.
[18] Ibid., 45.

towards privileging the *vita activa*, in what at times seems to be a one-to-one vice versa ratio of, the political life of the ancient and modern times. An analysis, which is complicated nonetheless but still demonstrates logic predicated on the assertion that what was once, is not what exists now. The parsing out of ancient private and public lives to demonstrate the problems set forth by the overbearance of the social on both realms suggests that modern political existence is an inversion of (perhaps, perversion of) ancient life, particularly Greek life, and its structured disallowance of what has occurred in the modern to have ever occurred in the ancient. As in the case of the private and public split, and the social interruption of that duality, where the Greek examples, and sometimes the Roman, are taken as evidence wagered against what modern politics has come to be, what might the transfiguration of the slave amount to in this respect? Does the absence of the modern slave imply that it, unlike the ancient slave, has been permanently incorporated into political society?

In discussing entrance into Greek political life as of such great importance that one must be willing to commit to death, the antithesis to this commitment is as an obstruction of freedom marred to "too great a love for life"[19] referred to as slavishness. Elaborating what constitutes slavishness further in a footnote to this passage Arendt states, "To understand the ancient attitude toward slavery, *it is not immaterial to remember* that the majority of slaves were defeated enemies and that generally only small percentages were born slaves," going on to note that Greek slaves were of "the same nationality as their masters" and Roman slaves were of birth.[20] The free man and the slave are distinguished by their access to the "good life," which in the Aristotelian sense means "the life of citizens."[21] The life of the citizen, which can be understood as *the* political subject par excellence, "was 'good' to the extent that by having mastered the necessities of sheer life, by being freed from labor and work," and more crucially so "by overcoming the innate urge of all living creatures for

[19] Ibid., 36.
[20] Ibid., 36 n.30 (emphasis added).
[21] Ibid., 36.

their own survival, it was no longer bound to the biological life process."[22] This asserts the that ancient slave is determined by a "love for life" that may arise through conflict or through natality and which bars it, through a demonstrated lack of courage, from entering the "good life" and shedding its biological determinates, the move from nature to action.

The particular concerns attributed to the relationship between the ancient slave and the free man, in my reading, are representative of an ambivalent and anxious relationship the human condition has to the modern slave. It is ambivalent and anxious for two reasons. First, because references to slavery arise only in antiquity and are called upon numerous times. Secondly, and the most crucial to this point, is that the modern slave is marked by racial Blackness and represents an irreconcilable tension that is born of modernity, the incessant preoccupation with Black social and political incorporation. The freedom to be "no longer bound to the biological life process," is a claim attributed to the ancient free man against his slave but arguably is making gestures towards the establishment of a modern human condition in which, contrary to what used to be, the slave is now encapsulated within.

The theoretical incorporation of the slave here resonates with the reading David Marriott provides of the racial fetish in the work of Franz Fanon. Marriott argues in defense of the overdetermination Fanon ascribed to the Black by way of racist fantasy, which appears in both phobia and fetish by stating the following:

> Fanon not only outlines a parallel between phobia and fetishism (in face of the other's proximity), but he also makes that parallel key to understanding the choice of object in the splitting of the subject, at least as far as knowledge and belief are concerned—in the face of the traumatized loss (or its intractability?) that is disavowed, pushed into the void of oblivion, phobia reincorporates what is

[22] Ibid., 37.

denied in all of its malefic proximity as a perfectly congealed remnant at "the root of [the subject's] world."[23]

Absent assertions about role of Blackness in the production of the human condition is not without relations of power. What it pushed "into the void of oblivion" is the grand scale of violence that concentrated on and was directed solely towards Black bodies in marking the global system of modern slavery. As Fanon asserts, prompting the above engagement by Marriott, "This object does not come at random out of the void of nothingness," and furthermore, "For the object, naturally, need not be there, it is enough that somewhere it exist: It is a possibility."[24] Greek political life shows clearly how the slave is "a possibility" of political structures and although the slave is not present in name in the shift from mediations on the ancient to the modern, the slave is there in theory providing unspoken political potentials for the modern subject of concern.

The scant traces of the modern slave appear in the mapping of the human condition, by Arendt, through a reliance on Rousseau, who is heralded as "the first articulate explorer"[25] of the social, as demonstrated in *The Social Contract, or, Principles of Political Rights*, which is commonly referred to just as *The Social Contract.* It is argued, that "he arrived at his discovery through a rebellion not against the oppression of the state but against society's unbearable perversion of the human heart, its intrusion upon an innermost region in man which until then had needed no special protection."[26] The rebellion staged in *The Social Contract* begins most famously with the assertion by Rousseau that, "MAN is born free; and everywhere he is in chains,"[27] arguing against perceiving the slave as one of nature, as theorized by Hugo Grotius. The denial by Grotius that "all human power

[23] David Marriott, "On Racial Fetishism," *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 18, no. 2, (Spring/Summer 2010): 216-217.
[24] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Markmann (New York: Grove, 1967), 155.
[25] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 38.
[26] Ibid., 39.
[27] Jean-Jacque Rousseau, *On The Social Contract*, trans. G.D.H. Cole (1762; repr., Mineola, NY: Dover Publication, 2003), 2.

is established in favour of the governed," employing the slave as his example, projects Rousseau to argue, "slaves lose everything in their chains even the desire to escape them" because "force made the slave first, and their cowardice perpetuated the condition."[28] Using Aristotle as reference, this claim is founded on the premise that, "men are by no means equal naturally, but some are born for slavery and others dominion."[29] However Rousseau makes a departure that is central to his position on the slave stating that although Aristotle was right in his attitude about the slave, "he took the effect for the cause,"[30] because although force may have produced the as slave in the first instance, it is the will of the slave that continues to birth its condition.

Force is then contained as power manifesting in a sustained event and not a continual process that can occur across time. It is a "physical power" that one yields to as "an act of necessity, not of will" and force does not imply a right upon its wielding because "if we must obey perforce, there is no need to obey because we ought; and if we are not forced to obey, we are under no obligation to do so."[31] The physical nature of the application of force produces the obedience and is without foresight or afterthought. This definition of force first critically misunderstands the atemporal dimensions of the force wielded in producing modern slavery. It also performs a philosophical maneuver that many critical Black Studies scholars have argued positions the slave within discourse to render it culpable of the violences inflicted against it. As Saidiya Hartman argued in her seminal work *Scenes of Subjection: Terror and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, "the recognition of the humanity of the slave did not redress the abuses of the institution nor the wanton use of the captive warranted by his or her as chattel, since in most instances the acknowledgement of slave as subject was a complement to the arrangements of chattel property rather than its

[28] Ibid., 6.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., 5.

remedy."[32] The force of slavery as a metaphysical and not simply physical imposition blurs the lines of power. The absence of an always-present physical power, places the slave standing alone in relation to the violence it endures, when the whip, the auction block, or any other spectacularized scene of terror is physically absent from the picture. Power is thus left sparsely apparent and only present in the hypervisiblity of the slave's injury, presumably self-inflicted. Although Hartman theorizes a particular manifestation of the slave institution nearly a century and a half after what Rousseau had the ability to reference, it is nonetheless applicable to the manner in which *The Social Contract* has labored across time to sustain claims of shared human community, between free men and slaves, such as what Arendt demonstrates.

When the theory of force provided by Rousseau is applied to slavery, slavery becomes an act of mutual agreements, "[since] no man has a natural authority over his fellow, and force creates no right, we must conclude that conventions from the basis of all legitimate authority among men."[33] Setting up slavery as a convention, posits the slave as a product of legitimate (read legible) conflicts of war, whether waged by the state or through ideology. This leads Rousseau to make convictions about the slave that sit in contention with the reality of the racially Black slave of this time. The social contract of the slave is for Rousseau, not a condition of essential alienation, but a condition in which "he sells himself, at least for his subsistence,"[34] where "each man could alienate himself, he could not alienate his children,"[35] and makes it so "it is an empty and contradictory convention that sets up, on the one side, absolute authority, and, on the other, unlimited obedience."[36] Slavery, in this respect, is constituted as war which is "a relation between things and not between person; and as

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[32] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 6.
[33] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, 6.
[34] Ibid., 9.
[35] Ibid., 11.
[36] Ibid., 12.

the state of war cannot arise out of simple personal relations but only out of real relations…"[37] Within this structure, although the slave is rightless because "the words slave and right contradict each other, and are mutually exclusive,"[38] rightlessness does not constitute the condition it is the effect and not simultaneously the cause and effect of being a slave. The slave is rightless because right is forfeited by an act of will.

Arendt draws from Rousseau the assumptive logic that there is nothing distinctive about the condition of the slave and the human. Furthermore, the only difference discernable lies in the inability of the slave to employ its will within the *vita activa* to produce an irreversible change to its political position in the world. Such a conflation must rely on an unspoken implied inverse that as the slave can be made human, any human can also be a slave. Not only does the racial nature of modern slavery prove this to be false, experientially speaking, but this calculus has no way of apprehending a logic pertaining specifically to relationship between racial Blackness and the slave and also racial Blackness and the human. It is crucial to understand how these categories collapse into one another and also how they do not. Just as Jacque Derrida finds in his assessment of how violence registers in the performance of law when justice is inscribed in law,

> the inaccessible transcendence of the law before which and prior to which "man" stands fast only appears infinitely transcendent and thus theological to the extent that, so near him, it depends only on him, on the performative act by which he institutes it: the law is transcendent, violent and nonviolent, because it depends only on who is before it –and so prior to it –, on who produces it, founds it, authorizes it in an absolute performative whose presence always escapes him. The law is transcendent and theological, and so always to come, always promised, because it is

[37] Ibid., 13.
[38] Ibid.

immanent, finite and so already past.[39]

If the modern law of slavery is Black, and what stands before the wielding of that law is Black, and if what has changed about the law of slavery from antiquity to the modern is Black, then Blackness as the law of slavery and not slavery as the law without a singular relational component (being), demands further interrogation. Blackness in relation to slavishness is a crucial parallel that reveals more about the labor Blackness performs as the slave of modernity than classical political references suggest in their invocations. It is my contention that the Arendtian human subject is able to carve out the right to have, or to mark the potential towards the possibility of, incongruent private and public lives specifically through the production of a being that stands before a different law constituted by rightlessness. The human subject is guided by an ambivalent fetish and anxious phobia of slipping into Blackness, where the zones of the social and political are unclear and where private and public life are structured by domination and coercion.

It is of no particular challenge to reveal rightlessness as a component of slavery, as Rousseau even argues that the terms rights and slave are mutually exclusive, however I find that thinking the slave as the only mutually exclusive being to modern rights leaves many stones unturned when placed in conversation with the free Black. The status of the free Black in antebellum period reveals the shortsighted duality that exists between the discourse of rights and claims towards political freedom, in ways that are arguably more political damning than revelations often times made about the slave's direct proximity to terror. The distinction between free Black and slave is being called upon here not to draw a line of demarcation between the two but to allow for a mediation on the stark similarities they each inhabit; which historiography has not so readily made apparent. Calling into question the precarious status of Black freedom under slavery presents a problematic demonstrated by these questions. How has captivity under modern slavery functioned in the political

[39] Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" trans. Mary Quaintance *Cardozo Law Review* 11, no. 5-6 (1989-90): 993.

imaginary as simply a direct relation to a physical master? Does the release of a slave from the control of a master mark any fundamental change in the subject status of that being's existence? Is the status of *being property* a metaphysical transfer of force that exceeds physical reach? How far does the force of slavery extend over Black life?

Approaching a Black Herstory: Sexual Violence as Structured Silence

The United States Supreme Court case, *Prigg v. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, most notable for its decision to uphold the jurisdiction of the Federal Fugitive Slave Laws over northern state laws that attempted to block the extradition of a fugitive slave to southern states, presents a case where white property interests and state and federal claims towards sovereign control of borders, mollify and leave untraceable the will and desire of the Black woman at the center of the proceedings, Margaret Morgan. The information the court presents about Morgan is terse lacking details beyond what would be considered hearsay under any other circumstance. She appears in text only in reference to others, Edward Prigg whom assaults and kidnaps her along with her children, and Margaret Ashmore who claims her as her slave who allegedly ran away along with her children from the plantation of her deceased husband in Maryland. We learn Morgan later gives birth to another child while in Pennsylvania. Beyond these details she disappears in the proceedings.

Edward Prigg was brought before the court of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania under the indictment of committing the crime of kidnapping, Margaret Morgan a free Black woman, with the intent to sell her as a slave in the state of Maryland. The lower court of Pennsylvania found Prigg guilty of this crime of violating Section II of the 1826 amended version of the 1780 Pennsylvania "act toward gradual abolition" which held, amongst other things, "if any person or persons shall, hereafter, knowingly sell, transfer, or assign, or shall knowingly purchase, take, or transfer of any negro or mulatto… out of this state… with the design or intent … of making him or her a slave or

servant for life… shall be guilty of a felony."[40] This verdict was upheld by the high court of Pennsylvania and was appealed to and decided by the U.S. Supreme Court reversing the verdict finding it unconstitutional and void. In the opinion Justice Joseph Story argues that the fugitive clauses of the constitution, "secure to the citizens of the slaveholding states the complete right and title of ownership in their slaves as property" and "its true design was to guard against the doctrine and principles prevalent in non-slaveholding states, by preventing them from intermeddling with, or obstructing, or abolishing the right of the owners of slave."[41] Furthermore, each dissenting opinion agreed with the overall verdict pertaining to Morgan however disagreed on the level of the role of state power. Northern states were granted no recognizable power to infringe upon the property rights of slave ownership. Regardless of the presumed split between the north and the south established in historical narratives as a stark political divide, slave law was the decisive law used to determine the status of the Black, in both slave holding and free states.

The legal auction that presided over the body of Morgan registered a value in her position as property that exceeds the realm of the monetary. The court feared that if states delayed property claim cases in lengthy litigation over debates pertaining to proper seizures of fugitive slaves, the owner "may not ever lay hands on his slave," robing the owner of his/her right to the actual body, replacing it instead for, "a mere remedy in damages; and that perhaps against persons utterly insolvent and worthless."[42] What is lost in losing a slave to monetary compensation worth its cash value? If the means are provided to purchase another slave what then is actually at stake in this loss? Proximity to power via the close physical encounter between master and slave is not what is jeopardized but what is lost is the ability of the master to carry out his claim against the slave until its end. If the master sought return of a slave that is what the right of property ownership guarantees,

[40] *Prigg v. Pennsylvania*, 41 U.S. 539 (1842).
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

just as if the master wanted the slave banished and sold from the plantation, or if manumission so happens to be granted.

Power is wielded in the act of making a claim against a body that is silenced in rebuttal. What sits at the crux of the problematic is *the claim*, which is established "in a just juridical sense, [as] a demand of some matter as of right made by one person upon another, to do or to forbear to do some act or thing as a matter of duty."[43] In the case of property "where a claim is made by the owner, out of possession, for the delivery of a slave, it must be made, if at all, against some other person."[44] The claim could not be made to Morgan herself to determine her status as free or slave but had be made to another legal person, individual or representative, who had access to claims over her body, just as someone granted physical ownership over her would. Rightlessness is not only presented in the face of the master but in relation to all rights bearing beings.

Whether Morgan was a slave or free, as Black she was granted no legitimate claims to rights. The determination of her status was made through "convention," amongst legitimate claims over the right to property. The status of property was not determined by the status of the slave in isolation to mediations on Black freedom. It was both Black physical freedom and captivity that are weighed upon by the court. And although Morgan was determined to be the rightful slave of Ashmore, had the courts decided she was in fact free, this opposing decision could not have in any sense released her from the tango of power that danced over her body by legitimate actors of the court; the justices, the plaintiff, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania representing itself and the behalf of other non-slaveholding states, and the Federal Government. Her body split amongst so many claims for rights, leaving the status of her freedom seemingly inconsequential. Freedom for Morgan was precarious at best, and unable to unhinge her body from the power conferred by rights

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[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.

bearing demands she had been made to endure, and demands that could not offer her political entrance into the realm of rights.

The only right potentially discernable for Morgan presented itself in the face of violence. However, it was a violence that does not register to the court, seen as tertiary and inessential to the questions it adjudicated. In fact, nothing beyond the initial tangential note in the transcript about her assault at the hands of Edward Prigg was ever mentioned. Leaving no evidence to suggest whether she was physically beaten and/or raped. She had no right to claim freedom from assault, as the court never considers if her assault by Prigg was a violation requiring legal redress. If she was not protected in a right from violence, then the right available is one that deracinated her body further by marking its absolute vulnerability to violence.

The obscurity of written record attesting to harm against Black women is not anomalous and speaks to countless unnamable presences in the historical record. Hartman demonstrates this problematic working through, what Hortense Spillers calls the, "urge to find a category that respected history,"[45] and resting in the uncomfortable erasure of the story of a slave girl who appears in the historical record only as she was written into a ledger by a slave ship captain, as a slave with whom he had laid. Hartman identifies her as Venus symbolizing her status as violated object erased through history. In the search for Venus, even as she transverses "the barracoon, the hallow of the slave ship, the pest-house, the brothel, the cage, the surgeon's laboratory, the prison, the cane-field, the master's bedroom,"[46] her right to legitimate naming cannot be found, she was only of service to others. Even the desire of reclamation to "write a new story, one unfettered by the constraints of the legal documents" for Venus finds that nothing, not even the "romance of resistance," is left

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[45] Shelly Eversley, Farah Jasmine Griffin, Saidiya Hartman, Jennifer L. Morgan, Hortense Spillers, "'Whatcha Gonna Do?': Revisiting 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book': A Conversation with Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, Farah Jasmine Griffin, Shelly Eversley, & Jennifer L. Morgan," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 1/2 (Spring/Summer 2007): 308.
[46] Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 26, (2008): 1.

untainted.[47] It is by way of violence that the bodies of Venus and Margaret Morgan emerges and through claims to rights that their bodies are submerged in an ocean of competing currents.

The bartering and bidding over the physical body of the captive was philosophical in nature. Personal property can only be fought *for*, on behalf of the interests that are placed upon it. It does not have the dominion of real property to be measured, calculated, or sustained in tangible ways because it is of a metaphysical value that it itself does not produced but is imposed on it from without. The body of Morgan enabled Ashmore to claims as a woman for the right of property ownership,[48] grants Prigg the right to carry out the duties of his job as he was hired to perform and the right to assault her at will, allows the state of Pennsylvania an attempt at establishing state sovereignty for itself and other states fighting for legislative freedom in a union, and established the dominion of the U.S. over all state jurisprudential proceedings within its borders. All of these claims decided without any attention to whether or not Morgan could produce any claims vouching for her own freedom. Any claim that might be imagined on her behalf to offer her protection against assault or the ability to argue her status as free person, render a vindicating decision by forcefully inserting claims for her rights within the archive that were never made present.[49] Her freedom or captivity was insignificant because her status as a property determined that she was Black amongst legitimate subjects, rightless in the face of legitimate social and political claims for the right to rights. What right does property (former slaves) have to rights?

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[47] Ibid., 9.
[48] See Sabine Broeck, "Enslavement as Regime of Western Modernity: Re-reading Gender Studies Epistemology Through Black Feminist Critique," *Gender Forum: An Internet Journal for Gender Studies* 22: (2008), 3. The argument Broeck employs here can be mobilized against some feminist arguments that would attempt to assert that Ashmore's gender complicated the power in question regarding Morgan's ownership because a white woman, not a white man, claimed her. Broeck argues, "the founding *difference* of early modern Euro-American societies was subject versus abject, of sovereign self versus sovereignlessness, of *thinged* property versus the subject; gender as modern category, comes to figure *within* that economy, that epistemology, as precisely a category to negotiate, for white European and US women, towards a status of sovereignty, subjectivity and property rights."
[49] Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 9.

When confronted with the historical record, contemporary political desires assume that mobility of condition can be placed on the past by the implementation of present will. That is to say, there is a prevailing political belief that the objectifications of Blackness in history can be displaced by a theoretical reengagement with its structures using contemporary modes of reason. For example, an assertion that would hold Margaret Morgan did possess rights through the performance of her daily life even if they were not apparent before the law. The problem with this political calculus is it displaces an analysis of power by privileging characteristics that have no essential bearing on one's right to life in the face of structural violence. Furthermore, it must assume violence as temporal to assert that the violence of the past does not also condition the desires and possibilities the present believes to reveal. This removes focus from the objectifying essence of Blackness while attempting to employ subject mobility as a generalized human condition that is misguidedly not afforded to Black histories. By establishing that there was freedom within systems of dominations for some, this political performance must maintain the dualism that exist between object and subject relations as a reasoning logic. Yet what is abandoned is an engagement with the logic of captivity and mobility, materially and metaphysically, that understands it as being predicated on a rigid Black and non-Black distinction across varying physical terrains.

In *Kindred*, Dana yearns to find her Black female ancestors. Learning that Alice Greenwood, and her mother are free Blacks, intrigues Dana drawing her to want to meet them, to understand their conditions of life as a free Black woman and a free Black girl child in a slave society. Rufus shared his short cut to their house and Dana sets out in the night to find them. Dana was aware as she says, "Blacks here were assumed to be slaves unless they could prove they were free—unless they had their papers. Paperless Blacks were fair game for any white."[50] However unbeknownst to her she is embarking upon a trail of violence that her conceptual framework of slavery and the

[50] *Kindred*, 35.

strictures of how it affected the lives of slaves, could not image. Alone in the woods, in the distance she sees eight white men riding on horses, near the location she expects to see the Greenwood cabin. She moves closers and waits and watches as a man and woman are accosted by these white men on horses and a young child is "allowed" to scurry away into the brush. The two are unable to produce their free papers, yet insist to the mob that they are indeed free that they have "no master." Dana narrates the scene, "They hustled the man to a tree so close to me that I lay flat on the ground, stiff with fear… The man was forced to hug the tree, and his hands were tied to prevent him from letting go. The man was naked, apparently dragged from bed. I looked at the woman who still stood back beside the cabin and saw that she had managed to wrap herself in something."[51] At this point the violent focus shifts to the woman as a man in the mob rips her blanket from her body and as she mumbles softly in protest he responds with, "Shut your mouth!"[52] The men then begin launching a barrages of sexually degrading comment her way, exclaiming, "What do you think you've got that we haven't seen before?" Such a statement positions her body as Black flesh that has been seen and used gratuitously. They all laugh as someone else hollers, "Seen more and better," and as they laugh and yell more obscenities her way, one in the mob begins whipping the man against the tree as the child weeps and the woman stands silently. The man silent to this point, begins to wail begging "Please, Master … For Godsake, Master please…"[53]

Dana is overcome with emotion, fear, and grief as she tries to rationalize her experience with the discourse and visual images she has encountered in her life, in the future of this encounter. Her thoughts race, "I had seen people beaten on television and in the movies. I had seen the too-red blood substitute streaked across their backs and hear their rehearsed screams… I was probably less

[51] Ibid., 35.
[52] Ibid., 36.
[53] Ibid.

prepared for the reality than the child crying not far from me."[54] Through her fear and emotion Dana finds that for her, "this last cowardice even brought me something useful."[55] Her thoughts lead her to place this mob in the discourse of slave patrols, "forerunners of the Ku Klux Klan."[56] Yet these rational thoughts that attempt a contextualization of this violence, a gesture to make sense of the horror, still cannot prepare her for her encounter with Alice's mother nor the fate she experiences upon her departure from this scene.

The mob departs but not before inflicting a final blow of violence. One of the patrollers, "punched the woman in the face as her husband had been punched earlier. The woman collapsed to the ground."[57] As the mob disappears Dana reveals her presence to Alice, whispering to her in the darkness. Alice's mother is not thrilled with seeing Dana, considering all she'd experienced, Dana spelled more impeding danger. As Dana introduces herself as a "freewoman," Alice's mother responds by saying "a runaway, you mean... you'll get me in trouble!"[58] She wants to know who sent Dana. Dana tells her Rufus. Trusting that Dana had not been seen by anyone else and therefore wouldn't bring more harm. Alice's mother opens up letting her know more details about her husband. Dana asks, "Does Tom Weylin own your husband?" She finds out that he does and that he was forces to "choose a new wife there on the plantation. That way, Mister Tom'll own all his children."[59] What she reveals is that her marital status lacks value and recognition because she is not a slave. Her children cannot be owned, hence Alice's freedom, therefore for the profit of the Weylin family her husband must procreate with an enslaved woman to ensure the continual production of a plantation labor force.

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[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid., 37.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., 38.
[59] Ibid., 40

Dana settles in telling the woman that she'd been kidnapped of sorts and that she needed to get back to her husband in New York. She tries to help Alice recover from the brutal violence she'd witnessed against her father and mother, and settle into bed, by offering to go outside and retrieve the blanket Alice's mother had left behind after it had been ripped from her body by the mob. As Dana steps outside and kneels to grab the blanket, she is confronted with her own fate. One of the patrollers had returned. He asks what she is doing there and her response invites a violent encounter that was destined to begin yet her crassness brought it on with an abruptness. She says "I live here… What are *you* doing here?"[60] Her response is met with a verbal and physical assault. "You got no manners, nigger, I'll teach you some!" He is struck by her physical appearance, you could be her sister," referring to Alice's mom, "her twin almost."[61] She stands before him in some form different but somehow just the same as her female ancestor. Though the trace amounts of difference do not save her from what unfolds. Dana scurries back to the Greenwood cabin just to be barred entrance by Alice's mother. She cannot bear any more violence she quietly asks, "please don't come in here" and before Dana had a chance to even consider entering the man caught her.

He proceeds to beat her. She reflects, "I had never been beaten that way before—would never have thought I could absorb so much punishment without losing consciousness."[62] Dana is kicked, punched, dragged, and repeatedly thrown to the ground as she tries to scramble away. In a quick move she thinks "his eyes," and thinks to gouge them but is unable to bring herself to do so. She thinks that her refusal to act has condemned her. She reckons that, "Now I would be sold into slavery because I didn't have the stomach to defend myself in the most effective ways. Slavery!"[63] He let her know she'd have to pay. He then rips her blouse open and tore open her bra. Dana fought to get away this time fighting back to the point where she thought she'd surely be killed. In a moment

[60] Ibid., 41.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid., 42.
[63] Ibid.

she came to the realization that, as she describes "pain had brought me back to consciousness" and it takes a moment of fighting with Kevin for her to realize she is back in Los Angeles. She'd escaped her impending rape.

The approach toward her female ancestors and an attempt to acknowledge and help their plight exposed Dana to imminence of sexual violence for Black women, both enslaved and free. Dana engages a conceptual framework that belies the violence that stands before her. She rationalizes the beating of Alice's father by connecting the images to that of which she had seen on TV and to theories about night patrols and slave captures. Yet she is devoid of a grammar of suffering that can bring her to account for the sexual violation of Alice's mother that also occurs simultaneous to the beating. She in fact says nothing about the sexual openness of the body of Alice's mother. She ignores it so much that as she in the faced with her own vulnerability to violence her thoughts continue to frame slavery definitively as the transaction of buying and transferring slaves. She can't think sexual violence in a sustained manner. Her clothes are ripped off and as she fights back her thoughts move from seeing herself as being sold into slavery to possibly being killed. She never mediates in a way that allows her to grab hold of her own sexual vulnerability. Somehow she is barred from thinking the absoluteness of this calculus. To Dana slavery reads as a war of maneuvers, captivity imposed on those of less resistance. Sexual violence as the rule of slavery however requires an acceptance that physical resistance cannot protect the slave from the sexualization of their existences. It is absolute. The framework she carries forth from the future is unable to see this. What she brings back to the antebellum south is a belief that slavery can be contained in thought, that all it was has already been spoken. Her encounters with sexual violence however speak a different tone, one of silence.

Dana's curiosity with the interracial underpinnings to her coming to being, read Rufus and Alice as equally consenting lovers. Although understanding her interracial roots resonated in her

desire to know slavery, what drew her back in time was not this desire. Instead, I argue the novel places Dana in a forced coming to being with the plight of Black women, free and enslaved, constituted by the paradigm of slavery. This forced engagement is sustained over time but trip after trip Dana fails to resonate with the sexual violations that she is confronted with. Sexual violence troubles all of her conceptual logics. She cannot see it as the makings of slaves, outside of the labor relation. Dana cannot accept that sexual violence is what determines her status in the world. She does not have the language for it, she simply cannot see it.

The inability for her to hold a sustained theorization of sexual violence as a permanent condition of the enslaved, disallowed her to imagine a relation of sexual vulnerability as what sutured the coming together of Rufus and Alice that thrust her family into the world. During her time nursing Alice back to health, Dana was placed in a recognition of Alice as an object of sexual openness, marking her gendered existence as that for her captor, Rufus. Yet seeing Alice in this manner still does not propel her to read herself through this lens. In Alice, Dana learns that freedom during slavery was precarious at best, determinate on externally imposed decisions to honor or dishonor the status of Black freedom. Through Alice and Rufus, Dana witnesses but has a delayed coming to realization that Black women are marked by slavery through an inability to claim resistance to the sexual encounters that pervaded engagements with their bodies. What ultimately tears her between the imagined distance placed on the imposition of space and time, the assumed separation between slavery and her world, is the fact of her sexuality. Just as all the women and men she encountered on her travels were subject to wanton sexual harms, forced marriages, forced breeding, rapes, the denial of maternal and paternal claims, Dana continues to read herself as situated outside of this, somehow other. To her she has the right to be free, legally and teologically determined.

Being confronted with her own rape, at the hands of someone she claims as a relative, places Dana in a position where for the first time in the novel, all logic fails her. In rejecting the narrative scripts of slavery and thus focusing on the actions placed before her, Dana is able to begin thinking about the reality she faces, "A slave is a slave. Anything can be done to her."[64] Even in this moment she still accepts that will can determine her status. As Rufus attempts to rape her she thinks, "I could accept him as my ancestor, my younger brother, my friend, but not as my master, and not as my lover."[65] In this moment Rufus let up his physical force, Dana continues to fight back. She learns resistance is futile. "I was aware he wasn't trying to hurt me even as I raised the knife, even as I sank it into his side."[66] Rufus's response connects her experiences of sexual violation, it gives them a frame, as she narrates, "Then he brought up the fist of his free hand to punch me one, and again as the patroller had done so long ago."[67] Dana then stabs him again. She is now attacking with force, acting without the precondition of thought. Dana's refuses to allow herself to carrying the markings of subjugation bore of sexual violence. She has yet to realize that this is not a choice. This refusal of terms is not wagered by her impulse to fight back, which is an absolutely necessity, but in her imaginary realm that shapes her thoughts about who she is, a rights bear subject imbued with the will to resist subjugation. This persistent relation to Blackness in the culmination of her thoughts, is want prompts her continual returns, in the end costing her a limb so that she may never forget, so she will always understand herself as connected to the overarching reach of sexual violence into the afterlife of slavery. What gripped hold of her and stole her arm was, "something cold and nonliving."[68] This is the hold of slavery, without the warmth of care, characterized by death, it

[64] Ibid., 260.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.

provides no clear and direct strata to recognize and incorporate it into discourse to bring recognition to the existent of totalizing absolute violence.

Pornotroping Possibility: Employing Silence as Theory

Empirically the social is where antiblack violence occurs and when it appears in the public it's degraded beyond the point of recognition. Arendt's social fear is of that very thing, when social life becomes deracinated beyond redemption and where the public is devoid of the political power to grant rights. The anxiety that the condition of the being held as property is a condition that can sustain itself against any body, misrecognizes lived experience for structural form. The ability to live a socially and politically violated life removed from certain rights does not essentially coincide with a condition that is constituted by an emergence into modernity through rightlessness.

The stark singularities uncovered in Black scholarship about the Black modern condition is often subjected to comparisons suggesting that an error was produced on the part of the theorist (or theory) allowing erroneous conclusions to be drawn about the particular state of Blackness. Fanon, Marriott argues, is amongst one of the most critically misunderstood theorists in this respect. This misunderstanding arises in the performed indifference to Blackness. Homi K. Bhabha's reading of Fanon for Marriott is a key example of this problematic as he argues "for Bhabha, Fanon's work remains to dialectal and phenomenological; that is, Fanon is too quick to interpret race as historically presupposed by social and political preconditions of modern subjectivity."[69] The methods employed by Fanon are scrutinized as "too much of a difference" from his theoretical tools, psychoanalysis and Marxism, however this critique misses the central argument in his theory "namely that race has been misrecognized as both form—of power and economy, civil society and institutions— and lived

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[69] Marriott, "On Racial Fetishism," 220.

experience (the misrecognitions defining identities)."[70] The indifferent positioning in relation to the centrality Blackness in theory, forms as a fetish "not in our relation to forces of appearance, but in relations to what is always missing from appearance that we assume to be masked,"[71] an appearance that cannot surface without force because it is in essence without presence. In this sense, "what remains irreducible in this logic, what remains fetishistic, is the refusal to accept the other as a universal singularity."[72]

Political theory has engaged this problematic many times over. Fanon responds to his debates with Jean-Paul Sartre about the Negritude movement as a freedom potential, in a manner that demonstrates the pitfalls and possibilities present when thinking politics in Black. Reacting to Sartre's reading of Negritude, Fanon argues, "When I read that page, I felt that I had been robbed of my last chance."[73] Sartre inferred that "negritude appears as a minor term of a dialectical progression" between white authority and Black inferiority, concluding that "negritude is the root of its own destruction, it is a transition and not a conclusion, a means and not an ultimate end."[74] Fanon however is not simply dissatisfied with such an assertion but insulted by the underlying assumptive framing of what Sartre is suggesting about the power of Negritude's transformation. Arguing further, "In opposition to rationalism, he summoned up the negative side [which is the position of Blackness], but he forgot that this negativity draws its worth from an almost substantive absoluteness. A consciousness committed to experience is ignorant, has to be ignorant, of the essences and the determinations of its being."[75]

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[70] Ibid., 221.
[71] Ibid., 223.
[72] Ibid., 234.
[73] Fanon, *Black Skin White Mask*, 133.
[74] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Orphée Noir," preface to *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre es matgache* (Paris, Press Universitaires de France, 1948), pp. xl ff.
[75] Fanon, *Black Skin White Mask*, 134.

For Fanon in Sartre's calculation, Negritude cannot ask questions about the subject status of the Black but can only perform within it, assuming that Blackness can ever function in isolation of the violent forces that produce it. Blackness is not an arbitrary marker of identity for a collective of people but functions violently forcing people into a shared condition of existence regardless of experience. Fanon argues, "Sartre's mistake was not only to seek the source of the source but in a certain sense to block the source."[76] Sartre accepting Blackness as an arbitrary essence of being, robbed Fanon of his last chance at escape because the structuring assumption of Sartre employs is that the tool of liberation from Blackness are already of this world. As Sartre states quoting Césaire, "Today let us hail the turn of history that will make it possible for the Black men to utter 'the great Negro cry with a force that will shake the pillars of the world.' (Césaire)"[77] Today is the day for Sartre that the Negro embarks upon revolution accessed through a cultural politics surrounding poetry. For him it is the recognition by the Negro of a blueprint already laid, conceived by philosophical tools, which proceeded and seemingly exceed Negritude and Fanon's purview, offering freedom. Today is not a new day for Fanon but another moment cast in the cipher of antiblackness. Sartre proves this fact as his assumption forecloses the possibility for the alternative form of existence that Fanon gesture towards in his theories as necessary and essential to abolition a paradigm that determines his being from without, and not simply to manage it. This freedom does not come from a right to rights, as right does not offer willfully any guarantees.

Pornotroping, is a term Spillers attributes, in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," to the "sheer physical powerlessness" inhabited by the captive Black body as a singular subject position, captured, shackled, and transferred across the Middle Passage into a (the) new world. Pornotroping is a consequence of a condition that reduces the body to the status of raw

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[76] Ibid.
[77] Sartre, "Orphée Noir," p. xliv.

material. Specifically defined by Spillers as a culmination of several structural processes that impose meaning onto the body of the captive, amounting to

> 1) the captive body becomes the source of an irresistible, destructive sensuality; 2) at the same time-in stunning contradiction-the captive body reduces to a thing, becoming being for the captor; 3) in this absence from a subject position, the captured sexualities provide a physical and biological expression of "otherness"; 4) as a category of "otherness," the captive body translates into a potential for pornotroping and embodies sheer physical powerlessness that slides into a more general "powerlessness," resonating through various centers of human and social meaning.[78]

Pornotroping offers up the flesh in place of a body, as "the zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment,"[79] it is a confined state of existence that transfers horizontally as well as vertically.[80] The inquest into the structures of captivity begin with contemporary concern for the degrading marks placed onto the Black female body, returning to the scenes of slavery that are dispersed across the globe, bringing the reader to consider the politics of the current with respect to what has occurred before it. To parse out the violence inherent to this condition, Spillers critically engages the "oceanic," a Freudian term designating undifferentiated identity, scaling the theoretical focus down to the abstracted terrain of the flesh straddling the murky and unsettled economy of the Middle Passage, "as a primary narrative … seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted into the ship's hole, fallen, or 'escaped' overboard."[81] This exposes no traces of implied humanity for the captive, whose atomized body makes "personality and anatomical features," "one human personality from

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[78] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," 206.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Jared Sexton, "People-of-Color-Blindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery," *Social Text* 28, no. 2 (Summer 2010), 41.
[81] Ibid., 67.

another" and "human personality and cultural institutions" indistinguishable.[82] The violence described exists across time and continental geography, as the cited sources by Spillers strongly suggest. The pronotrope is inherently sexually violent and such a foundation cannot be disarticulated from its usage, in theory or application. Contemporary politics that mobilize in response to this structure must respect the reality that its foundations are unscathed.

Alexander Weheliye, in an article entitled "Pornotropes," attempts a recuperative project that seeks "potential/freedom" from within the pornotroped condition. Through an engagement with Giorgio Agamben's theorization of bare life, Weheliye finds that there are generative possibilities to placing the plantation in conversation with the concentration camp (the camp) to think "through the two spaces' commonalities and disparities without awakening the demon of comparison."[83] However the performance of thinking across commonalities and disparities in this case does not escape, arguably cannot escape, drawing comparisons between the two. The plantation is reduced to the details Agamben attributes to the camp, named as a "suspension of law in the name of law," the state of exception, asserting that "extreme brutality and directed killing frequently and peacefully coexist with other forms of coercion and non-coercion within the scope of the normal juridico-political order"[84] producing the *homo sacer*. Having cited early that Agamben notes, "the syntagm homo sacer names something like the originary 'political' relation, which is to say, bare life insofar as it operates in an inclusive exclusion as the referent of the sovereign decision,"[85] the racial slave is made to fit this calculus through a forced conflation. In this account, "the *homo sacer*'s social death appears as the only feature of his or her subjectivity," because there is an implied full domination that "mere life such as racial slavery [which] opens up a sociopolitical sphere in which different

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[82] Ibid., 68.
[83] Alexander G. Weheliye, "Pornotropes," *Journal of Visual Culture* 7, no. 65: (2008), 69.
[84] Ibid., 68.
[85] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 85.

modalities of life and death, power and oppression, pain and pleasure, inclusion and exclusion, form a continuum that embodies the hidden and not so veiled matrices of contemporary sovereignty,"[86] somehow disproves.

Does slavery open up different modalities of "life and death, power and oppression, pain and pleasure" for the Black that are free of violent overdetermination? The miscalculation inherent here is that slavery is taken to be a "suspension of law in the name of law" and not *the* law and only law available to its operation. The state of exception implies that there is another law of existence for the Black to return or propel into that resurrects a cartography not bound by captivity. From this attempted (re)evaluation of the slave as not truly socially dead, the analysis rest on the case of the U.S. domestic and U.S. controlled foreign prison as case example. And while Black bodies inhabit a disproportionate relationship to the U.S. prison, the analysis does labor to apprehended how the potential for pornotroping rest in an institution that has grasp over both bodies and flesh. Yet as the case of Margaret Morgan demonstrates, the inscription of Blackness governed her body as the inscription of law regardless of its physical place in society. She was positioned the same, as a slave, a free person, and as a subject before the courts. The law is not of the institution but of the foundational bond that exist between modes of power and the constitution of the body's structural positioning in theory.

"*Homo sacer*ization," in Weheliye's application to the pornotrope, becomes one available to anyone through the process of racialization. Slavery is granted human interlocutors as a process "that racism, whether in the colony, the concentration camp, the plantation, the prison, or in Guantanamo Bay exhibits no dire need for a legal state of exception, although it has a hard time refusing it when offered as a fringe benefit."[87] Slavery is thus not theorized as the inaugural institution of modern racial violence but as an institution subject to racist practices born of the

[86] Weheliye, "Pornotropes," 69.
[87] Ibid., 70.

"suspension of law in the name of law," just like all other racial violences. By applying bare life to the pornotrope the possibility uncovered within it is not of the original context that provoked Spillers to theorize the term. It is possibility within pornotroping for the subjects of bare life, not the subject of permanent property. And furthermore this conflation of the *homo sacer* with property assumes that the condition that ushered slavery into the modern world, as an institution designated solely for the Black, is no longer present, as the plantation has been emancipated, necessitating focus on other institutions demonstrating political urgency. "It is not immaterial to remember"[88] that the scene of contemporary markings on the Black female body commanded the articulation of the pornotrope as a condition interlocked atemporally to the past as well as the present.

Claiming the "monstrosity" produced on the pornotrope is political act of right for Weheliye. "Guerilla warfare" being the tactic employed to arrest the right of humanity and "liberate forms of life, thought, and politics from the tradition of the oppressed, and, as a result, disfigure the centrality of Man as the sign for the human."[89] To engage in guerilla warfare entails the ability to name and identify as physical combatant. With all the hands that hover over and grab property each harming it without actually making the chose to physically own it, how can property name a specific enemy? What tactics are namable to property in mobilizing a claim against the pornotrope without an institution to hold accountable that legibly dominates the sum total of all flesh? Recuperating the monstrosity must on condition preserve the pornotrope, leaving the Black further exposed, as the only freedom foreseeable for it is the complete destruction of the monstrosity and the world that makes it possible. The application of pornotroping as a theory of violence to bodies not constricted by the property relation requires a deformation of its constituent elements to give it a form suitable to the conflictual conditions of others. It is then no longer discernably Black and theory is unable, without the tools of heavy lifting, to see under what singular condition it emerged. Modern slavery

[88] See note 13.
[89] Weheliye, "Pornotropes," 78.

becomes incorporated into analogy focusing attention on all other things “like it,” and not specifically on it as a particular manifestation of violence, that which imposes sexual violence as a marking of flesh. Standing alone politically in the realm of the public human condition, modern slavery’s claim towards liberation amounts to, nothing at all. As nothing is said in an attempt to mediate or ameliorate the sexual violence at the heart of monstrosity bore of the pornotrope.

The monstrosity encompasses two sides; that of the captive and of the captor. Possibility has always marked the pronotrope, however that possibility is locked in the status of Blackness as the being for the captor. The Black female body sits at the nexus of the possibility and impossibility central to the operation of the pornotrope. “She” represents a violent relation to sexuality and the world, before it can be reclaimed and refashioned by impulses of Human relationality and the identification of claims central to the impulse of Man. The vulnerability to sexual violence which inscribes sexuality onto the Black female body stifles Black possibility for distinction, by producing Blackness as structurally bound to the imposition of sameness. However, I would not contend to know the truth of this structuring. It is unknown with definitive proof how the Black woman connects to the world of slaves to the world of humans. Although the violence repeats, the magnitude of its force refracts outside the boundaries of definitive meaning. However, what can be seen through the descriptive gesture is that the violent negation of Black gendered existence imparts recognition onto human subjects, the benefactors of Man for which the human sciences account for with the grips of determinate theory. By approaching a Black herstory through an insistence on deploying the descriptive gesture as a theoretical model, allows for thought to rest on what cannot be accounted for within the realm of political terms. In the silence that situates the question of, what is to be done about sexual violence as the social and political structuring of slavery, a space for theory arises that troubles the waters of what is assumed about what can be and already has been spoken about the life and afterlife of slavery.

Belle's Beloved: Hauntings, Feminized Slave Ships, and the Politics of Writing Black Women

> Autonomy is freedom and translates into the much championed and revered "individualism"; newness translates into "innocence"; distinctiveness becomes difference and the erection of strategies for maintaining it; authority and absolute power become a romantic, conquering "heroism," virility, and the problematics of wielding absolute power over the lives of others. All the rest are made possible by this last, it would seem—absolute power called forth and played against and within a natural and mental landscape conceived of as "raw, half-savage world."
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> – Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*

> …interracial sexuality for the black personality has not so much been a matter of simple exclusion or repulsion or loathing by whites as one of forced intimacy, suffocation overproximity, invasive familiarity, an uninterrupted and unsolicited *closeness*. The structures of white supremacy not only enable the intrusion of white fantasies into the black *imagination* but, more important, ensure that black *existence* would be ensnared in the dream work of white communal protocols – from dawn to dusk from dusk to dawn.
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> – Jared Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism*

This chapter brings literature into conversation with cinema to continue and expand upon the labors of the previous chapters in demonstrating how the specter of slavery haunts the freedom narratives of gendered subjectivity. Specifically, this chapter focuses on a close reading of *Belle*, a 2013 independent British film directed by Amma Asante which received notable success in the United States, and *Beloved* the 1987 national bestselling Pulitzer Prize winning novel by Toni Morrison. Each work is inspired by a Black woman figure in history. Although the film and the novel are centered on different women with disparate life experiences, the drafting of each tale exposes the labor necessary when attempting to narrate the structure of Black gender with respect to the legal histories of slavery. Each depiction is haunted by the specter of sexual violence both found in the constitutions of the Black women and in the law. *Belle* evades this haunting in the formulation of its character story, however the vestiges of sexual violence and slavery continue to appear throughout the film texturing its perceptive power. *Beloved* however is an intentional introspection into the impossibilities that emerge when sexual violence is unapologetically centered as the essential

violence of slavery. The coming together of these two imaginative works refract onto one another the compromises and political stakes emergent within writing Black women into history.

The vision of a 1779 Johann Zoffany portrait hanging in the Scone Palace in Scotland, a painting depicting two Georgian era women one Black and one white situated side-by-side, prompted Misan Sagay to imagine the story of the Black woman captured in this history. The image is striking because unlike other visual imagery of Black people during this time, this painting did not depict servitude, showing the Black woman groveling as less than her white counterpart. Instead they pose equally dignified, equally situated in time, so it seems. The Black woman captured in this painting, Dido Elizabeth Belle, an heiress and daughter of an enslaved Black woman, Maria Belle, whom her white father, Sir John Lindsay born of wealth and a British Naval captain, captured from a Spanish slave ship off the coast of the West Indies. She spent her life living in England at the estate of her uncle, William Murray, Lord Chief Justice Mansfield. From there, *Belle*, staring Gugu Mbatha-Raw, emerges as Sagay labored to bring the story of Black woman figure in the painting to life. However, Sagay's visions for the film were contested and rewritten by the director Amma Asante. Asante was quoted as saying, "The original script was 'history-lite' and not a weighty piece of work"[1] and was thus rewritten from a more realistic and convincing perspective. Ultimately it was decided that Sagay wrote the majority of the script making her the principle writer. However, what is intriguing about this disagreement is the perception of how to depict history by way of imagination. *Belle* tells a one-dimensional history of slavery, identity, and Black womanhood. While aspects of the story are correct, the overwhelming majority of the film is a fictionalized interpretation. History becomes the contested terrain that grants and denies the ability to write a Black female protagonist into a broader narrative of existence and violence.

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[1] Anita Signh, "Belle Authors in Bitter Feud over Writing Credit," *The Daily Telegraph*, August 3, 2014, accessed January 21, 2016, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/11008121/Belle-authors-in-bitter-feud-over-writing-credit.html.

The narrative in *Belle* circulates around the life of Dido, as she is referred to throughout the film, as a mixed race woman living an aristocratic existence, quite contrary to the social standing of other Black people during this time. In addition to her life, the pinnacle underpinning that threads the film together is the story of the murderous atrocities that happen aboard, the Zong, a British slave ship that is perversely used to tether and boast the central love story. The interweaving on Blackness, gender, the life of Dido, and the Zong, merge together a peculiar relation given the narrative labor of the film, that draw into critical question the points by Asante that suggests this film provides justice to history in a manner the original Sagay script could not. The narrative maneuvers to suggests that Dido exists as subject in the world, an heiress freed from slavery by the white lineage of her mixed race blood line, and though she is haunted by the perils of slavery, she herself is subjugated separately from the plight of slaves. While, at the level of life experience Dido in fact was not a slave, she is positioned in the film in relation to her white relatives and counterparts as an object of their subjectivity. As the film labors to position Dido as mixed race, somehow between Blackness and whiteness, "mulatta" and post-racial in a very racially stratified moment in time, yet the ability of *Belle* to circumvent Dido as a Black woman, like other Black women, is overshadowed by a haunting.

The deliberate crafting of Dido as an asexual figure facilitated by using the mind/body split to designate Dido as character of the mind, not solely of her body is unsuccessful. Situating Dido away from wanton Black female tropes such as the Jezebel is a strategic positioning to locate her presence by means outside of a dialogue about sexuality. Though there may be a present desire to cast Dido as a being of the mind, the cinematic strategies[2] are unable to separate her from the discursive script

[2] In *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*, noting the inability for cinema to narrate conceptual coherences for Black and Native grammars of suffering, Frank B. Wilderson

of sex that she as a Black woman is enmeshed with. As Patricia Hill Collins argues in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*,

> The creation of Jezebel, the image of the sexually denigrated Black woman, has been vital in sustaining a system of interlocking race, gender, and class oppression… But Black women's treatment also demonstrates how manipulating sexuality has been essential to the political economy of domination within each system and across all three.[3]

The experience of Dido as a Black woman living an aristocratic life is produced through the terms of sexuality. How she came to occupy this particular space and how her body is placed within these categories cannot be contextualized without a focus on sexuality. To evade such would be to forcefully assert Dido as a subject amongst other subjects and subjugate any perspective on what culminates her as both Black and gendered. Yet the context of the sexuality wagered against Black women is not mired by identity but by the forced associations imparted through the use of sexual violence. Sexual violence and specifically rape function as representative violence that determined the lengths for which possession over Blackness can be extended. As Hill argues further, "Rape and other acts of over violence that Black women experienced… accompany Black women's subordination in the system of race, class, and gender oppression."[4] For the purposes of the larger argument with respect to Blackness and *Belle* employed here, I would extend the point by Hill as not simply constituted the systems of oppression. Instead, the point here is to assess how identity categories such as race, class, gender, and sexuality are constituted through the sexual violence of the

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III asserts, "This grammar can be discerned in the cinematic strategies (lighting, camera angles, image composition, and acoustic design), even when the script labors for the spectator to imagine social turmoil through the rubric of conflict (i.e., a rubric of problems that can be posed and conceptually solved) as opposed to the rubric of antagonism (an irreconcilable struggle between entities, or positions, the resolution of which is not dialectical but entails the obliteration of one of the positions)," 5.

[3] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, (New York: Routledge, 1991), 174.

[4] Ibid., 177.

slave. The slave imparts coherent on the very notion of identity. The subjectivities that emerge in *Belle* all arise from one central figure Dido's mother, a slave Maria Belle, as the opacity of her presence signifies onto the ability of the script to construct a therapeutic tale of the place of one Black woman in history.

The obscurity of Dido's mother must be attended to; in order to unearth the assumptions at play in molding the positive affect the film carries. The narrative is heavy handed with illustrating, Sir Lindsay, as a loving spirit, who cared enough to save Dido from dangerous plight of slavery, as he professes upon leaving her in the care of Lord and Lady Mansfield, "sweet child, a ship is no place for one so precious as you."[5] Yet her mother is structured into obscurity. There is a reliance on the assumption that Dido's mother in fact chose lovingly to be her mother, and was a willing companion in a romantic exchange with her father. She is largely unspoken of, a haunting in the narrative, for which the viewer must assume that she existed as she is eluded. Given that Sir Lindsay presents as kind with concerned demeanor, her mother is held as object to his performance thus creating the belief that his behavior symbolizes her emotions. Yet this fact is unknown. There is no space within the affective structure of the film, which is categorized in the romance genre, or within the narrative to grasp hold of her mother as an unwilling captive, a powerless slave in relation to the position of her father. Furthermore, there is certainly no room left to think her mother as a victim of rape and Dido a product of a forced sexually violent relationship. Did she, her mother, willing release Dido to the care of her father or was she taken? If the later point reigns true, would this then recast Dido in the Mansfield family, who is thought as an adopted child afflicted by her color, instead as a captive who is permanently disassociated from the constitution of the family and situated under a vastly different arrangements of power.

[5] *Belle*, directed by Amma Asante (2013; Century City, CA: Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2014), iTunes.

The formulation of romance, the genre of the film and its labors, gives critical perspective on the questions pose about. Morrison writes with respect to the impulses of this genre that,

> There is no romance free of what Herman Melville called "the power of Blackness," especially not in a country in which there was a resident population, already black, upon which the imagination could play; through which historical, moral, metaphysical, and social fears, problems, and dichotomies could be articulated. The slave population, it could be and was assumed, offered itself up as surrogate selves for mediation on problems of human freedom, its lure and its elusiveness… In other words, this slave population was understood to have offered itself up to reflections on human freedom in terms other than the abstractions of human potential and the rights of man.[6]

What Morrison offers here brings the previous paragraph into critical tension as it is imbued with assumptions about will and agency. This is by no mistake of the hand. The previous argument relies on a shared sentimentality, as the precursor to determining the value of Dido as a part of the Lindsay lineage and thus resident of the Mansfield's Kenwood home, by assessing her placement in positive or negative terms. This presentation mirrors that of the film and is presented to draw deeper into the problematic of thinking reciprocity with respect to the slave. Yes, to ask the question about willing sexual encounters is a necessity when considering the realities of slavery. However, the question of willingness is not individual or confined to the sexual encounter. Such looms over the unethical foundations of slavery writ large. Though with respect to slavery, its history, and the present conditions it has borne, should sexual encounters between the enslaved and enslavers ever be read through the context of consensual engagements? How is consent given and is that a right of

[6] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 37-8.

the enslaved? Can sex between slaves and masters ever be ethical? What were the conditions of the capture of Maria Belle by Sir Lindsay?

As Hartman so poignantly argues in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* "…by emphasizing complementarity, reciprocity, and shared values, this hegemonic or consensual model of slave relations neutralized the dilemma of the object status and pained subject constitution of the enslaved and obscured the violence of slavery."[7] With respect to Hartman, notions of "mutuality" and "the recognition of the captives humanity" is a gesture that "protects" the master, not the slave.[8] The protection is wagered in misappropriating the violence of slavery as a wavering circumstance whether than that of an absolute structure. Slavery as violence, lends perspective to the manner in which enslaved engagements should always be wagered in thought, whether with brutal or kind masters, enslaving or non-enslaving nonblacks. Slaves did not oscillate from subject to object given the particularities of circumstances, but instead maintained an object status willed for the capacity of the master to be the bearer of rights. Hartman explains that, "…orthography provides the illusion of direct testimony, immediacy, and authenticity, which only serves to (re)produce the master's text, even if donning the rags of the slave."[9] In the case of *Belle* the illusive orthography, is adorned with Elizabethan dress, the corridors of the Mansfield mansion, the auspices of high society life, the privilege of inheritance, the emotion of courtships, and the affect that arises from embodying political choice. Dido is cloaked by subjectivity that is contingent on the status of whiteness. Her freedom is determined by the Mansfield family and their wielding of power, however Dido is powerless in her own standing to authorize and announce her freedom. *Belle* as a narrative structure elides and rejects Black feminist thought. It wholly ignores a sustained

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[7] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 53.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

conversation about Dido in relationship to other Black women, her mother most centrally and the other nameless Black women on screen. It sacrifices the opportunity to tell a story of Blackness and gender by way of Dido and her supposed exceptionality by supplanting these concerns with the ultimate goal of folding into whiteness.

The role Lord Mansfield played in rendering the legal decision in *Gregson v. Gilbert*, the Zong case, is the moment the film relies on to liberate Dido, from the position she occupies throughout as a partial subject. Her capacity to maneuver in the world by way of choice, in this case through her choice of spouse, is thought to be the emancipatory release necessary to free Dido from the uncertainty of being not quite Black or white but mixed. To bolster the effect and affective response to this transcendence, *Belle* effectively rewrites the history of the Zong. The film recasts an historical legal decision pertaining to an insurance claim over enslaved bodies, as one representative of a concern with the greater moral horrors of slavery, when in fact history shows it did not. As James Walvin argues in, *The Zong: A Massacre, The Law, and The End of Slavery*, "…the Lord Chief Justice [Mansfield] and the Solicitor General agreed with the slave traders that the killing of 132 Africans was *not* a matter of murder."[10] Thus bringing us back to the point by Asante about the film paying respect to history. If history was the concern of the film, why was the legal history of the Zong massacre falsified? What kind of imaginative possibility is denied for the film if it contrarily narrated the true relationship of Lord Mansfield to the *Gregson v. Gilbert* decision?

What then is the story of the Zong? The Zorgue a Dutch ship, later recasts as the Zong after its capture by the British, set sail from São Tomé, an island of the coast of Gabon, brutally overcrowded with 442 enslaved Africans onboard. The captive Africans were captured and loaded at various points along the west coast of Africa, making stops at the Cape Coast, Accra, and finally in

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[10] James Walvin, *The Zong: A Massacre, The Law, and The End of Slavery*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 213.

São Tomé so that "some captives might well have already been imprisoned on the ship for a year," prior to the voyage across the Atlantic.[11] The slave ship, as it was, arrived in Black River, Jamaica with 208 slaves on board, one-third of the captive Africans were murdered, thrown overboard across the Atlantic and Caribbean in three separate murderous events. However, is this *the* story of the Zong? The Zong was a nightmare upon any account, although the information of what transpired and why, is murky and vague. Zorgue or Zong, meaning "care" in Dutch on face value lacks the personification of feminized gender often given to slave ships to mark their beauty and abundant glory.[12] Yet, the designation of care connotes a form of femininity and a peculiar relationship between humans marked as cargo and the enslavers who held them captive. The context of care on the Zong made the choppy treacherous waters of the Atlantic and the Caribbean Sea the mass grave of 132 lives, who prior to their deaths were already casted into a state of nonexistence, awaiting an unknown fate in lands elsewhere.

The history of the Zong encapsulates a complicated and confusing tail. The case of *Gregson v. Gilbert* charged that, "Gregson, the shipowners, were claiming for the loss of their slaves (£30 each) from their underwriters (Gilbert). The latter refused to pay, and thus the case was a simple matter of maritime insurance."[13] The case presents itself as a decision about the rightful loading of cargo, human bodies, the proper designation of supplies, the loss of water, possible dehydration, famine and sickness, and the decision to off-board cargo before reaching land. To think about the case with respect to these terms, insurance moneys and the right to or not to claim such with respect to a list of object integrities, performs an erasure and miscasts what situates the atrocity represented and not represented. The indictment should resonate with the unethicality of a structure that marked

[11] Ibid., 74.
[12] Hortense Spillers writes, in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," "The cargo of a ship might not be regarded as elements of the domestic, even though the vessel that carries the cargo is sometimes romantically personified as 'she'," 214.
[13] James Walvin, *Black Ivory: Slavery in the British Empire*, (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 16.

Africans as cargo, tagged with a price, converting humans to the status of flesh. This provides the context for murder. The terms of this charge are not isolated to the Zong alone, but draw into question global investments in attempting to narrate the murderous nature of slavery through rational and coherent terms. The conditions that produced the Zong are located in the unethical arrangements that positioned the bodies on the ships as crew and captives long before any of their arrivals above and below its deck. As such to read this case without respect to a larger critical analysis of slavery and the machinations of its violence would be to place the Zong in a spectacularized historical position and thus dispossess the story of the explanatory power to mark and articulate the stakes at play in accessing the political renderings of slavery. To think via this context is make the Zong, like *Belle* an exceptional story, and not the rule of Blackness.

M. NourbeSe Philip argues in "Notunda" a prologue to *Zong!,* a collection of poetry that attempts unsuccessfully to imagine the rupture that frames the inability to *know* the truth of the enslaved on board beyond the narratives given to them by their captors, "the *ratio* at the heart of *Zong!*, however, is simply the story of be-ing which cannot, but must, be told."[14] The story of the Zong repeats itself as a ship equipped for less human bodies than it carried and loaded with a particular capacity of water, food, and supplies to carry the ship throughout its journey, to which some slaves succumbed to illness and death others were deliberating chained together and tossed overboard, murdered. However, this is not the story and its repetition is perpetually injurious. The unnamed and unknown, violently produced as cargo, is a history written into permanent obsolesces. Even the desire to produce slaves descriptively with integrity fails by way of conceptual design. The fact that cargo must be conceived as Human, the very terms their existences were excluded entrance into and used to uphold the life possibilities others, undergirds every aspect of modernity. The impulse to name them is necessity but the ability to do so an impossibility. As Philip argues further,

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[14] M. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong!*, (Toronto: The Mercury Press, 2008), 200.

"Through not-telling. And where the law attempts to extinguish be-ing, as happened for 400 years as part of the European project, be-ing trumps the law every time."[15]

The concept of not-telling, in the Philip quote above, and retelling what I argue is the gesture *Belle* attempts with the Zong, is what separates the labors of imagining from the hold of the slave ship to thinking from the position of those that occupied the cabins.[16] Retelling slavery, for the sake of this argument, employs a framework already available to thought that casts the narration of a story and it challenges through registers of morality to attest to a shared consensus. Contrarily, not-telling slavery rejects the context of storytelling altogether, drawing focus to what cannot be told even as it bears telling. Not-telling is a freedom drive that acknowledges the context of freedom requires another register of thought and existence to bring respect to that which is structurally debased. Retelling finds freedom in the preconditioned registers of existence, it contends that freedom for the slave can be granted by way of legality and that such freedom requires recognition and reciprocity as the context of its validity. In order to apprehend the libidinal drive that prompts the retelling of the fate of *Gregson v. Gilbert* and the roles Dido and Lord Mansfield played in its decision, it is first imperative to approach the interracial love story imagined as that which liberates Dido, from the purgatory of the affliction of her racial caste. After a critical reading of the possibilities asserted through interracial kinship and marriage, the use of the Zong as a redemptive possibility comes clearly into view.

For the initial five minutes of the film, Dido is silent as her position in the world is set and contested by the whites around her. Her father captures her from a slave dungeon, where a Black

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[15] Ibid.
[16] In *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of US Antagonisms*, Frank B. Wilderson III, offers the concept of writing from "the hold of the ship" despite the "desire for flight," xi. This speaks to the necessity to write with respect to the gravity of the structural position of the enslaved without fleeting to imagine a reality that is perceived however disingenuous to the conditions of being held as cargo.

woman, wearing clothing that suggests she is a slave or a servant, grooms Dido as she awaits his arrival. This woman never speaks or is spoken to. However, the positioning of her body next to Dido as her father stands before her suggests she authorizes this transfer to his care but this fact is unknown and seems unlikely given her status compared to his. Sir Lindsay departs the dungeon carrying Dido and is met with chiding stares from white men, particularly the carriage driver that awaits his return. He and Dido then arrive at Kenwood house, the Mansfield estate, to which they are confronts by Lord and Lady Mansfield. Neither is reserved with expressing their thoughts about the color of her skin.

After Lord Mansfield asks Sir Lindsay, "what in the world have you done," Lady Mansfield exclaims in an angered shocked "she is black." Sir Lindsay responds that "she is my blood" to which Lady Mansfield again replies "she is black." This interaction sets the stage for the experiences Dido faces while living amongst the Mansfields. Lord Mansfield contends that she is a "mulatto" acknowledging her interracial roots however he still maintains his anger about the fact. Although the term mulatto is offered in a tone of disgust, and is an offensive term by its own means, it is lobbied to lessened the stain of her Blackness, to assert in one sense an acceptance that she is the child of Sir Lindsay in a respect that is not paid to the vast majority of children born under similar circumstance during slavery. Lord and Lady Mansfield heed to the cries of help from Sir Lindsay and accept to take her in, deciding that their other niece Lady Elizabeth Murray needs a companion and as such they allow her into their family dynamic. Dido is immediately placed into this life to which her family lineage is explained to her by Lord Mansfield as they walk side by side through a hall of family portraits. He points to a painting of Sir David Murray to which Dido replies, "Elizabeth's papa." This is the first time she speaks in the film as she acknowledges and affirms a distant never seen white male relative.

The film labors in the beginning scenes to usher Dido into the world of whiteness through the asserted desires of her father and the reluctant acceptance of her presence by the Lord and Lady Mansfield. She is framed into discourse by their mediations over her body. I argue that in this capacity and throughout the film she operates as an object to the discursive assertions and subject desires of white characters on film. The voice of whiteness is an absolute requirement needed to grant any credence to Dido, she in no capacity can authorize an alignment with power for herself outside of the Mansfield estate and her preconditioned social interactions. By keeping Dido insulated to Kenwood house and the Mansfield social and political engagements, the film rest on an affective register that is disingenuous to Dido's actual structural position in the world. The labor present on screen relies on the assumptive logic that family is possible for Dido and through this family she is then able to find her own presence in the world as a mixed race heiress. However, the previous statement is not the case. While the narrative dances around Blackness, calculatedly positioning her in scenes with other Black people to grant credence to Dido as different yet mildly the same, it cannot achieve this goal. The film is unable to circumvent the weight of the historical realities of Blackness during this time. Furthermore, while trotting lightly around Dido and her Blackness, the instances in which her color is brought to bear on screen, contradict the overall intentions on film. It cannot reconcile gross offenses to her body that white women and white people more broadly are not made equally subjected to. Thus the concept of love for Dido is enmeshed in her denied protections by the whiteness from sexualization and sexual aggression. Also, while attesting to Dido as a woman deserving of love, in spite of her race, Dido is edited into a position of sexual openness through various cuts and cinematic maneuvers that mark her vulnerability to sexual intrusion even as this reality is largely ignored in the script. Though the status of Maria Belle as a sexual captive is never explored, Dido inadvertently is positioned as such through the forced attempt at marking her transcendence through interracial love.

The entrance of John Davienier, or Mr. Davienier, as he is referred throughout the film, into Dido's life is the pivotal turning point to the tone presented thus far. Mr. Davienier refers to Dido as no one has ever done, as the Lady of the house. All the white women residing in the home are designated as such regardless of their marital status but not Dido. The fact that Dido is Black bars her gender from this respected title. Through Mr. Davienier, she is confronted with another external representation of herself, one that defies the formal principles of English etiquette. Dido is taken back by his response to her, as the frame cuts in and out of focus with her face, blurring and clearing the shot as it splices back and forth between the two. Dido chastises Mr. Davienier for barging into the estate during a formal dinner engagement. Dido, however, was not invited to dine with the family out of formality and respect for their guests. Her exclusion from dinner and the arrival of Mr. Davienier become the competing contentions of the film until the end. They come to represent the world she is born into and the world she will come to inherent by way of her deliberate action and rightful pairing with a partner who respects her as an equal. Yet the notion that she inhabits a world divided and fused by way of her choice to defect and choose otherwise, coalesce the burden of undoing the violences of slavery onto Dido as a Black woman acting. It misappropriates the context of antislavery protests as confined to the minds of the enslaved and those marked by Blackness. The story then becomes fueled by a moral obligation to make slaves see themselves as capable in the world, as opposed to more aptly focusing on the grotesque violences that subjugate their existences.

Mr. Davienier plays the role of politicizing Dido. Everyone is concerned with the Zong case, so much so Lady Ashford a guest at the Mansfield dinner mentions it to Lord Mansfield, however Dido in her absence does not hear this conversation. Dido seems imprisoned and the only one unaware of the world around her. She does not find out about the Zong proceedings until Mr. Davienier shares them with her. Even then she is shocked that such atrocities could have occurred. What is strikingly about the assumption of ignorance that marks Dido, until the revelations by Mr.

Davienier, is that her treatment by the Mansfield family suggests clearly that Blackness is violable and unwanted. She is denied access to dine with the family, she is summoned to never marry and spend her life confined to Kenwood house, she is denied the formal title of Lady as her other female "relatives" carry, upon arriving at Kenwood house with her father her Blackness is spoken of with absolute disgust, and yet it is assumed she is ignorant to the fact that Blackness is what catalyzes this all. Her naiveté is positioned to use innocence as a justification for both her not knowing but also for her delayed and superficial associations with other Black women.

The unraveling of the love triangle that unfolds is the consciousness moment for Dido. Although Lord Mansfield instructs Dido that she is to never marry and to take on the position of Lady Mary as the caregiver of the family, Dido rebels. Oliver Ashford courts her. He is intrigued by her difference. He describes her as "the most rare and exotic flower," even as his brother James is disgusted by her Blackness. It is in the intimate conversations between Oliver and James that Dido as a sexualized figure comes into view. James responds to the above comment by Oliver with "One does not make a wife of the rare and exotic, Oliver. One samples it on the cotton fields of the Indies..." Though the film makes no reference to this fact, this comment reflects onto Dido and the conditions of her mother. The "sampling" of Black women's bodies collides Dido into a reference with slaves and works against the strident suggestions by the film that she is different. She unlike any other lady in the film is marked by hypervisible sexuality. The attempt by Lord Mansfield to relegate her to the status of housemaid, does not make her an asexual figure like Lady Mary. Instead what is spoken but unspoken is Lady Mary is not married because she was once married before a widower, however Dido is not marriage material because her sexual capacities are structured by an openness that forecloses her from the pretexts granted to white womanhood. Although, Dido is not the "lack," in the psychoanalytical sense, of white womanhood. Her sexuality is sutured by its own precise relationship to sexual violence and gender. While it is thought that no one will marry Dido

this does not connote that she is unmarked by sexuality. Quite the contrary, her sexual availabilities are open. While the film tries to triangulate this marking by suggesting Mr. Davienier desires Belle for her mind as an equal while the Ashford brothers exoticize and sexualize her body, the cinematic visual script speaks a different truth.

There are two striking scenes that sexualize Dido through acts of violation. Although only one incident is framed as such by the film. The acts involve John Ashford and Mr. Davienier. While the incident involving Mr. Davienier occurs before the one with John, the outright violence inherent to the encounter between Dido and John helps to bring into focus the actions of Mr. Davienier. John makes it no secret that he finds Dido "repulsive" and rapeable. As his brother Oliver courts Dido for marriage against the suggestions of both his mother and brother, he fetishizes her being and her financial inheritance. Though Lady Ashford and John are determined to expand the role of their family in the British Empire they are unsure if doing so by obtaining money and property from Dido is the proper way to do so because she is Black. Oliver never stands up to the abhorrence expressed by his mother and brother about Dido, he simply speaks of her differently. After purposing marriage to Dido, she accepts and the two are scheduled to be married. At a picnic of multiple British high society families, John accosts Dido while she is standing alone behind the brush. He verbally insults her insisting she is desperate to find a husband, she returns an insult about his family and their dwindling wealth. It is in this encounter that John sexually assaults Dido. While the camera pans closely into the reaction on her faces as he shoves his hand into her midsection, it is clear that he is sexually intruding upon her body. Though the specifics of this act are not seen, as focus is placed on her emotion and his rage as the frame is only concerned with their faces. Dido cries out that "That is painful, sir." John responds with, "have you never been manhandled?" Dido screams "how dare you how dare you" to which John responses "with ease." The camera pans back

showing that others including Lady Elizabeth are in the distance yet no one sees what happens to Dido.

There is a short pause that suggests Dido is reflecting on what happened to her body and the "ease" with which she was sexually violated. She stands in the frame of a window, appearing only as a shadow in the distance. There is no dialogue directly after to mediate on this sexual assault, just a solo reflection. Though she later attempts to share this with Lady Elizabeth, her ill feelings about John, are met with Lady Elizabeth reassertion that Dido is Black, thus implying her perspectives lack important. As the window scene fades and Dido is next to Mr. Davienier discussing his aunt and her desire for him to marry. They share laughs and the scenes continue to progress day-by-day showing their growing personal relationship. In the sequence of events, Dido and Mr. Davienier develop a strengthened companionship not in spite of what occurred with John but because of it. Mr. Davienier, is the character positioned as the man who respects her mind and does not covet her body. Together they discuss the Zong in secrecy, after Lord Mansfield fires Mr. Davienier as his legal apprentice. The details of the Zong continue bringing them back together as they work to decode the case and unlock the riddles of the events and decisions that occurred onboard. Dido steals away with the assistance of Mabel, a Black house servant who labors for the family while they are in London. Dido grants no reciprocal gesture of protection to Mabel, who teaches Dido how to properly comb her hair as Mabel's mother once taught her. Dido instead simply asks Lord Mansfield "Is Mabel a slave?" After being appalled at the question he replies, "She is free and under our protection," Dido says, "Oh! Like me." After he assures her Mabel is paid a "respectful wage" there is no further conversation of her. Dido then transition into a conversation about the Zong using Mabel as a conduit to ask "Papa" tough questions she has not had the courage to ask thus far.

What leads to the blossoming companionship of Dido and Mr. Davienier, was the eagerness of Dido to continue their conversation about the Zong after his departure from his post working for

Lord Mansfield. When Dido sees Mr. Davienier in a crowd of people at the Ashford estate during a social gathering she is determined to speak with him more about the Zong. As she and Mr. Davienier sneak away to speak without being seen, a group of guests pass potentially exposing their presence behind a hedge. Mr. Davienier pulls Dido close, shoving her body into his, the camera pans to her breast and Mr. Davienier lustfully gazes into her eyes. This moment in the film, which is used to announce Mr. Davienier's affection for Dido, instead performs an insidious labor. The handling of her body and the focus on her breast illuminate Blackness in a manner the film labor to contest. It makes her a focal point of sexuality by way of her body, not by choice of her mind. Contrary to Mr. Davienier referring to Dido as "Lady" this hypersexualized treatment in the film bastardizes the meaning of this designation. The effort of the film to assert affection through the thrusting of her body against a man elides the periodization of the film. If the intentions were to present Dido as equally capable of love as her white female counterparts, specifically Lady Elizabeth, why is Dido the only female body that is groped in a sexual manner multiple times on screen? What is equally striking is Mr. Davienier never apologizes for his forceful grabbing of her body, which is an encounter that disrespects the gender formalities of this era. What the scene reveals is that Dido is situated in the film by a sexual script that exceeds that of gender in a sole binary. While the film attempts to assert Dido is aware of this conceptually, as she disagrees with her relationship as a single heiress to Elizabeth's assertion that women are the property of men, the difference in this sense is not at the level of identity.

The situation of Dido, though framed as a concern with associative categories, denies mediation on what structures the usage of her body as a vessel for the appearance of others. The triangulation between Mr. Davienier and his growing love for Dido and John Ashford and his sexually aggressive behaviors use each scenario as a counterpoint of expression. Dido makes the choice not to marry Oliver Ashford professing that "My greatest misfortune would be to marry into

a family who will carry me as their shame - as I have been required to carry my own mother." The dual implications of this statement liken the Ashford family and her experiences at the Mansfield estate as symbolic of a refusal to engage her Blackness. This is nonetheless true. Without saying explicitly but through action Mr. Davienier credited with offering Dido to exist in the world. He unlike anyone else asks of her mother to which she replies, "I know very little of her other than the color she has given me." Opening up a dialogue where in her previous life relationships as she has not previously experience. All the while the film uses the body of Dido to broach the symbolic coming together of the two. Through her self-assertions and developing political consciousness Dido is positioned as maintaining an ultimate control over her life, yet no attention is given to mediation over her ability to determine her own body autonomy irrespective to her speech.

The relationship of Dido and Mr. Davienier plays a buffer to her mother as invisible object in the film, to the Black women who exists in the shadows of Dido, and to the female bodies kept and casted overboard on the Zong. The film employs an affect of naiveté with respect to the interracial sexual logics of slavery. It refuses to contend with the sexual violence and objectification of Black women's bodies as commodity fetishes. Thus the thrust and grab of Dido is read as "love" when in fact it harkens to the sexual openness the marked slaves, and Blackness more broadly. However as Jared Sexton so poignantly argues, "there is no interracial sexual *relationship*" as the project of "multiracialism refuses to countenance the fissure between the intermingling of racialized bodies and the social-symbolic effort to mediate racial antagonism at the level of sexual practice and identity."[17] If we read *Belle* as a cinematic labor that performs a crowding out gesture with regards to the structural realities of Blackness, sex, and slavery, so that Dido can arise as the films heroine, various contradictions emerge. There is first the previous mentioned problematic with the situating

[17] Jared Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 154.

of her mother. She is place strategically in sexual obscurity as an asexualized placeholder. She is an object as her Black gender and sexual status engender how the film reads Dido. Yet the bowels of sexual violence under slavery cannot be undone. The film cannot crowd out the curiosity to know the status of Maria Belle's captivity. The weight of the slave record bears down on the processes of thinking and memory, when the script is approached from thinking Blackness. In order to do so Maria Belle must be located in theory and if her location in history cannot be rendered that silence broadens the conversation of various emergences, particularly the interracial union that coalesce around Dido.

In addition, Belle's relationship with Mr. Davienier grafts onto the slaves of the Zong as immaterial cargo. If the death of 132 slaves becomes the required catalyst for Mr. Davienier and Dido to recognize their love, this makes love a function of antiblackness. Such an association with Black death is not freeing but further condemning of Dido. The use of Black death to herald one Black figure, Dido, at the expense of all others Black people is not to the credit of her but the projects of whiteness and antiblackness. The story does not attend to and respect the stories of the dead. To put this another way, it does nothing to apprehend the weight of what it means to never know the stories of the bodies thrown overboard. It pays no attention to the slaves, while claims to bring vindication to their deaths. Dido, functions as a protagonist for the captor, as her actions function to misalign focus on the Zong as a case where the murder of the slave is taken as murder minus a larger context to violence committed on board prior to this event and the atrocity that Africans were loaded onto ships as cargo. Lastly, and most haunting, it offers no credence to the ethical dilemma of what it would have meant in the world if the cargo was not slaughter, if slaves actually arrived in Jamaica alive. With respect to the film, it seems their "safe" arrival somehow assumes they made it to shore unscathed.

The legal decree, at the end of the film, by Lord Mansfield that the Zong case required another hearing to assess the legality of slavery, did not free Dido, as it did not free the captives of the ship. It cannot bring Dido into a conversation with the Black women captives onboard nor can it honestly position her alongside the countless Black women servants she encounters throughout the film. The context of this scene, critically lacked honesty about Lord Mansfield and his role in the Zong ruling. If Lord Mansfield were in fact painted as history has captured him, *Belle* would fail to exist as a romance. The reliance on mutuality necessitates that everyone, both Black and white must move forward consensually. Yet the terms of such are not mutual as whiteness is given the ultimate determinate weight to give and take life. The labor of the film struggles to suggests Dido controlled her own destiny in the world however her life is so closely tether to the authorizations granted to her by Lord Mansfield. While in the final scene following the ruling handed down by Lord Mansfield in the Zong case, Dido speaks in defiance announcing her love for Mr. Davienier, it is his approval of their union that gives the film its final resting point. If love in this context is Dido's only possibility for a future, then what does love mean for a larger Black feminist conversation about the positioning of Black bodies in the world? *Belle* does not offer a response to that question as it focuses on the individual narrative as if such could ever exist for Dido.

Belle breathes life into a painting but this life is not hers this life is an imaginary fueled by forces external to Dido and her existence in history. In reality little is known about her outside of her time living with Lord Mansfield. In fact, the biography, "Belle: The Slave Daughter and the Lord Chief Justice," says very little about the life of Dido and in fact is a history book about Lord Mansfield, so much so that the title shares his name. Furthermore, her reference as a slave daughter is no off-hand coincidence but speaks to her position in relation to the Mansfield family and her striking invisibility in history given her familial ties. As one online commenter writes in a review of this book, "This ends up being, more than anything else, a short biography of William Murray, Lord

Mansfield… As Dido's biography, this book is certainly frustrating, because we simply can't know her intimately, and it almost feels unnecessary (not because her story doesn't need to be told, on the contrary, we need way more narratives about [people of color] in Europe…"[18] So is the case that the history of Dido labors, as a history of Lord Mansfield that marks him a dutiful white who granted the residence to his Black niece during the time frame he adjudicates two of the most charged cases on slavery in British history, *Somerset v. Stewart* and *Gregson v. Gilbert.*

While desire might craft the assumption that the presence of Dido at Kenwood house mattered for British legal history,[19] such a desire must discount that proximity to Black people, both as slaves, servants, and bastard relatives, is the history of slavery. The fact of the matter is intimacy played an insignificant part in the wagering over Blackness as commodity that others were granted the right to determine the fact of. The film does not separate Dido from the position of a status determined by the power of others. In fact, it solidifies this point by charting her movement solely with respect to the action of white subject freedoms on screen. For the purpose of the central love story, she becomes a conduit for Mr. Davienier as he asserts himself as politically outraged by slavery. His opposition is strengthened by his willingness to accept a Black woman as a counterpart. Though her stance against slavery does not require the presence of Mr. Davienier but a deeper introspection into her own Blackness. Certainly being an enigma in time is not romantic. Furthermore, the history of Lord Mansfield is vast and well circulated yet there is very little known about the Black woman who grew up residing in his home. This is not an occurrence by accident but a representative tale about the value of the lives of Black women. More is known to the account of

[18] Claire, "Community Reviews on *Belle: The Slave Daughter and the Lord Chief Justice*," *Goodreads*, May 11, 2014, accessed February 1, 2016, http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/18038255-belle.
[19] Henry Louis Gates Jr., "Did Belle Really Help End Slavery in England?/Who Was the Real Dido Elizabeth Belle?," *The Root,* August 26, 2014, accessed February 6, 2016, http://www.theroot.com/articles/history/2014/05/did_belle_really_help_end_slavery_in_england.html.

Lady Elizabeth Murray, whom the film framed as nearly impossible to pair with a suitor because she lacked a dowry and was not an heiress like Dido. However, history has more to tell about Lady Elizabeth than Dido. The status of wealth does not carry a significant weight to augment and shift the structure of concern as Lord Mansfield manumitted Dido in his will at death.[20] The film however attempts to assert that Dido is undeniably free. The necessity of Mansfield to "free" Dido, suggests that she was as previously argued, a captive at the Mansfield estate, in life and in death. It is a near impossibility to tell her story without giving it validity through the use of the Mansfield name. Dido is object to his subjectivity. Historically absent in his continued historical presence.

Could this story exist otherwise? Dido did not need to politically come to know the Zong with respect to the details of *Gregson v. Gilbert*. In her life, she came to know the context of Zong by other means. Dido, like the captives on the Zong, was positioned by the subtext of "care." As the Zong (Zorgue) in translation means care, Dido was placed in the care of Lord and Lady Mansfield. The feminized interpretation of care as bestowing a level of respect for life is missing in both contexts. While I am not attempting to reduce the atrocities of the Zong by making an uncritical association to the manicured life lived by Dido, the point is to make reference to that of positionality. In history, Dido as a Black woman and the captives of the Zong as Black people were left to the care of whites who were granted (violently) the right to govern their bodies. *Belle* rests on Blackness as an arbitrary association, performing the theoretical labor to ascertain under what pretenses Dido and the captives of the Zong are situated. Slavery cannot be reduced to a generalized story about moral wrong or right. The breadth of this history encapsulates the tenets of how the world has come to cohere and mean as we know it. If we never can know the stories of the African captives on the Zong what redemption is a legal ruling, albeit an incorrect ruling rendered for the sake of a cinematic crescendo? Using the Zong to generate "good feelings" for the purpose of

[20] Ibid.

making a film is more than political ignorance, it employs the same logics of erasure at the heart of this case, even as it makes claims towards offering visibility. Watching *Belle* without extensive access to historical and legal records provides a manufactured sense of hope about the abolition of slavery and the afterlife of its violence.

However, a different story of the Zong can and does exist, Philip demonstrates this in her refusal to allow *Gregson v. Gilbert* to exist as the sole fact of the Zong. The refusal of the case to acknowledge that a violation against the enslaved onboard occurred, compelled Philip to impossibly write the story differently. To mediate and hold attention to what cannot be said and known about the dead. In "Defending the Dead, Confronting the Archive: A Conversation with M. NourbeSe Philip," Philip explains to Patricia Saunders her contentions with the law, stating,

> this two-page account of *Gregson v. Gilbert* that I found, squeezed out the lives that were at the heart of this case. It is ironic, isn't it, to think that the very sea that took the lives of those Africans now performs the task of reconstituting those dried facts—the water in the ocean has filled this case with all of the bodies, all of the stories of those bodies that were squeezed out of this case to arrive at this two-page report. Which, by the way, doesn't even say that it was wrong to end their lives. Absolutely nothing (apart from one comment in the case) is about murder, though murder it was. And that to me is what then really makes me question the law—for us, as African people—and our relationship with it.[21]

The documents of slavery, crafted by those who enslaved and maintained a vested interest in slavery, require critical decoding to assess the presence of power and violence in employing language to script a story. This fact makes *Zong!* by Philip such a powerful "poetry of the future,"[22] as it solely

[21] Patricia Saunders, "Defending the Dead, Confronting the Archive: A Conversation with M NourbeSe Philip," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 26, no. 12 (2008): 66.
[22] See, Kara Keeling, "Looking for M- Queer Temporality, Black Political Possibility, and Poetry from the Future," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15, 4 (2009): 565-82, which draws on

uses the words available in *Gregson v. Gilbert* to refute and refuse its narrative. The poetics Philip engages to make painfully aware that the words used to argue the claims in *Gregson v. Gilbert* lack the possibility to repair the loss of life and know the contexts and existences of their worlds prior to being captured. In this respect, I ask the question what about the women on board the Zong? Respectfully, Philip provides no clear answer. Before transitioning I leave you with residue of a gender and the Zong, "ration the truth… the she negro… ruth… drives me mad… and the facts… whore they laid here … to rest she died… *love* the slave… invest in…"[23]

Wading in the Waters of Rememory

To write about *Beloved* the 1985 novel by Toni Morrison, is to approach a conversation that is so saturated that any further meanings given to the text my bleed on deaf ears. Yet, with full knowledge of this I employ *Beloved* here to draw critical attention to the use of history as a catalyst for imaginary renderings of sexual violence and the capture it asserts over generation span of Black women's lives. *Beloved* as a theoretical politic bears repeating as a necessity to disallow its words incorporation into a celebratory depiction of the bygone days of slavery past. *Beloved* is now and although it is a reflection on the slavery as an institution and the precarious conditions of freedom for those marked as free and enslaved Blacks, the desires present in how the text is approached is very much a concern with the status of Blackness in the here and now. While some search the text to find reasons to assert that emancipation as ultimate freedom,[24] others find that it illuminates the

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Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louise Bonaparte*, Trans. Daniel de Leon, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1907) for its usage of the term "poetry from the future."

[23] Philip, *Zong!*, 73

[24] At the inaugural Critical Ethnic Studies conference held at the University of California, Riverside in 2011, a nonblack person of color, commenting on a paper given by a panelist was upset with what he saw as the absurdity of afropessimism as a theoretical model. He offered what he believed was another way of seeing Blackness, commenting that *Beloved* is a text of freedom because it ends at sea on a boat without an imposed direction. Others in the room promptly corrected him saying this

structural positioning of Blackness in a hardened association with slavery so much so that possibility must always answer to the conditions of antiblack sexual violence. What Morrison offers through *Beloved* is what *Belle* failed to achieve, a refusal to crowd out the Blackness of others to craft a tale about the existence of an individual. The explanatory power of *Beloved* is enriched by the hauntings of Blackness conditioned by slavery that the novel refuses to force into the shadows. Concluding with *Beloved* is not to juxtapose this story with *Belle* to argue the right and wrong way to write history. Instead it is to point to the descriptive weight that emerges when the sexual violation of Black women grounds the purview of imagination.

The concept of "rememory" shapes what is said about the intimate lives of Black women and the effects their suffering has on a broader conceptualization of Blackness. Rememory to the text is what situates its meaning within and outside of the context of its pages. It is the absent present historical record conjuring, reflecting, and imparting meaning upon the movement of the characters. It also aligns the characters in a manner that disallows them to be sole the imagination of a novel. These characters are rememories of the silences of the dead. The text functions by proxy to their structured impossibility. It rests within the dis-ease of stories that may never be told. The protagonist Sethe explains the roots of rememory to her living daughter, Denver, say,

> I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place –the picture of it– stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there in the world… I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened.[25]

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scene does not depict a boat at sea but a slave ship wading in the waters of the Atlantic captive at every possible turn.

[25] Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 43.

Interested in the transfer of rememory, Denver asks, "Can other people see it?" Sethe replies with a definite "oh, yes. Oh. yes, yes, yes." She explains that one can "bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else" as the "picture" never fades "it's going to always be there waiting for you. That's how come I had to get all my children out. No matter what."[26] The rememory of slavery is the contexts of modernity and the capture and theft of African bodies that breathes its life.

Specifically, the rememory animating the text is arguably that of Margaret Garner. A fugitive slave who upon fleeing a plantation in Kentucky and crossing a frozen lake into Ohio to free herself and her children from slavery, makes the choice of committing infanticide rather than submit to their capture. The Cincinnati Daily Gazette reported on January 30, 1856 that "We learned the mother of the dead child acknowledged she killed it, and that her determination was to kill all the children, and then destroy herself, rather than return to slavery."[27] Garner appears in public and legal discourse, and is at the same time buried, through her commission of infanticide. She and others, who braved escape together, were brought to trial and found guilty of murder and accessories to the crime. At their arraignment, which took place the day following their arrests, the Cincinnati Daily Enquirer published an in-depth account of the court room proceedings. The article cites that, "Before the court was adjourned it was understood that a warrant had been issued by Judge Clark for the four adult slaves upon the verdict of the Coroner's inquest, finding Margaret Garner guilty of killing her child, and the slaves with having been accessories."[28] Garner and the others were held in legal limbo as the Ohio courts presided over the case of infanticide while the United State Marshal pending the decision regarding their fugitive status held their physical persons. The Enquirer goes on to report the scene in the court as the captives are taken out of the courtroom, stating,

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[26] Ibid., 43-4.
[27] Mark Reinhardt, *Who Speaks for Margaret Garner: The True Story that Inspired Toni Morrison's Beloved*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 59.
[28] Ibid., 66

> Previous to the removal of the prisoners… a larger crowd collected in the streets, and there was considerable excitement. The principle promoters of fuss where some mulatto women, who were extremely lavish of opprobrious epithets to the offices that guarded the way leading to the vehicle.
>
> "D[amn] you!" shouted one of these saddle-colored ladies, who, by the way, was dressed in the extreme of fashion, in answer to a request of one of the officers to stand back, "D[amn] you, I'm free born, half white and as good as any white-livered b[itc]h in Ohio!" The officer took no notice of her or her companions, but not so with a pair of masculine darkies who undertook to express their disapprobation of the proceedings in a rather noisy manner, and who were in consequence pounced upon and, in spite of their own strugglings and some little demonstration of a rescue, hurried to the Hammond-street Station-house and locked up.[29]

Standing in outrage and political solidarity with Margaret Garner and the other captives these nameless protesters bring forth the competing positions being wager in this case. While it might seem that the primary contestation is that of political alignment with or against slavery, the narration of this scene however draws more into focus. The causal focus of the flesh-tones and body adornments of the protesters situates their places within an objective visual text. The context of visuality determines the right of presence and the right to offer speech, regardless of political alignment, in relation to the trial. The two "masculine darkies," not even grafted the subjectivity of men, and assaulted and arrested for their protest. The officers ignore the "saddle-colored ladies". This does not mean they are in fact free from the subjugation of the law because of their status as mixed race and "ladies." In fact, the noting by this reporter seems it almost happenstance that this

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[29] Ibid.

officer ignored them. While the arrests appear as a point of division between being "saddle-colored" and being a "darkie," what arranges these protesters, Garner, and the other captives, Simon Sr., Simon Jr., and Mary, along a similar axis is the attention draw to their physicality as markers of difference. The reporter offered pages of recitation from the court proceedings never once marking the bodies of the various authorities speaking. All were presumably white and thus granted the intelligibility of authorized actors and speakers to determine the course of Blackness before the law and with respect to slavery. They were never called into question and marked by their presences and that alone. The violence inherent to the presence of the captives, the free protesters, and others touched by Blackness animates the rememory Morrison offers in *Beloved*. This is not to suggest this particular scene influences Morrison, but it is the conditions that offer up some as problems at the constitution of their presence, and not their actions, that drives the power of the text.

Beyond the news reports of the trial proceedings and the ruling to return her to slavery, the historical record of Garner is painfully bleak. The irony is her story continues to breathe life into the law, though detached from her actual being, as it determines the continued course of 1850 Fugitive Slave Act and the discourse of abolitionism.[30] Morrison did not want to write the story of Garner's life as she said she didn't research her story only scant details about the children.[31] Instead she argues she,

> … wanted it to be our past… which is haunting, and her past, which is haunting -the way memory never really leaves you unless you have gone through it and confronted it head on. But I wanted that haunting not to be really a suggestion of being bedeviled by the past, but to have it be incarnate, to have it actually happen that a person enters your world who is in

[30] Ibid.
[31] Mervyn Rothstein, "Toni Morrison, in New Novel, Defends Women," *The New York Times*, August 26, 1987, accessed February 18, 2016.
http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/01/11/home/14013.html.

> fact -you believe, at any rate - the dead returned, and you get a second chance, a chance to do it right. Of course, you do it wrong again.[32]

Thus the context of rememory emerges in the relationship to an experience tethered to a structure of violence that speaks in excess of individual stories.

In *Beloved* misrecognition pervades the existences of 124. "124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children."[33] Sethe is confronted with many opinions of her life and actions that she feels no need to entertain. As a former slave, who once ran away to escape the sexual and physical abuse she endures on Sweet Home plantation, Sethe is marked by the injuries of her past and the persistence those markings carry over her continued existence. Though it may seem that as a slave her story resonates in the same context as countless other Black women of her time, there are qualities of her life and being that make her singularly Sethe. Though the injuries of slavery might distribute themselves by seemingly familiar means – whippings, sexual assaults, displaced kinships structures – the effective refractions of dispersal over her life and her relations with others are not easily contained. A distinction she learns early on from her mother who teaches Sethe how to identify her in the case that she may be disfigured in death, "'this is your ma'am. This' and she pointed. 'A am the only one got this mark now. The rest dead. If something happens to me and you can't tell me by face, you can know me by this mark.'"[34] In this moment Sethe longs for a similar marking, something to make her unique, but it was not until she had her own mark that she realized the gravity of its existence and meaning, stating "I didn't understand it then. Not till I had a mark of my own."[35]

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[32] Ibid.
[33] Morison, *Beloved*, 3.
[34] Ibid., 72.
[35] Ibid., 73.

Confiding in Paul D all the things that have happen to her since they last saw one another, after they each spent years apart in precarious freedom, Sethe explains:

> 'After I left you, those boys came in there and took my milk. That's what they came in there for. Held me down and took it. I told Mrs. Garner on em. She had that lump and couldn't speak but her eyes rolled out tears. Them boys found I told on em. Schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows there still.' 'They used cowhide on you?' 'And they took my milk.' 'They beat you and you was pregnant?' 'And they took my milk!'[36]

Sethe is overcome by having something "taken" from her through this sexual violation. When she confided in her mistress about what happened she received a beating that scarred her for life. Scarred, as her mother had been, by this beating, she explains that the plantation master "schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows there still."[37] The brute force of the beating covered up the symbolic and structural evidence of what happened to Sethe. The visible permanence of this marking, the tree, distorts perceptions of the violence and privileges the aftershock as if it were the essential cause. This marking became a part of Sethe, not reducible to the actual event of injury, as it framed her life and relations far before and after its violent application. She carried the potential for this marking and the violence of the marking as a slave. As a free woman it continues to grow and define her relations with other people. As she explains to Paul D, a former slave and the person she tries desperately to love, "I got a tree on my back and a haunt in my house, and nothing in between but the daughter I am holding in my arms. No more running – from nothing."[38] She accepts her condition but in this acceptance she is not

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[36] Morrison, *Beloved*, 19-20.
[37] Ibid., 20.
[38] Ibid., 18.

conceding to its terms. Her desire to learn it is to learn its means on her own terms in an attempt to reconcile a condition that has split her across many worlds.

As such, because "it grows there still," sexual violence is disappeared under the assumptive veil that violence is constituted by specific identifiable presence. Furthermore, when Sethe attempts to tell Paul D, his concern is placed on the physical beating and her biological state. Neither of these things are what trouble Sethe from the core. His misunderstanding of her pain leads her to say it again with exclaimed fervor. "And they took my milk!" Paul D does not respond. Nor does she elaborate. Instead the text attempts to produce an imaginative allegory of what it means that Sethe's milk was taken, using a structure of grammar that was never intended to tell Sethe's story, only to conceal it. Toni Morrison structurally cannot write the story she wants; external impositions give *Beloved* its/her "power."

Having committed infanticide in attempt to save her children from a return to slavery, Sethe refuses to allow her life to be stagnated by this event. As others prescribe onto her an objective status of someone who committed an unthinkable act, Sethe does not allow this description to halt her life. In fact, she could not allow it to stop her movements as she continues to care for herself and others in relations that did not cease to exist after her "crime." While outside of the confines of 124 Sethe is aware of what others thought of her, "The others, ahead and behind them, would think she was putting on airs, a house with two stories; tougher, because she could do and survive things they believed she should neither do no survive."[39] However she refuses to be what others believe of her. Their objectifying perception of her tries to crystalize her existence into a moment that came and went, while a myriad of other things in her life continue to occur.

The haunting Sethe experienced as a result of her action, she experiences alone and with those privy to the interior life of 124, those on the outside were unaware of just how she suffers and

[39] Ibid., 56.

also how she struggles to move beyond it. Haunted by the spirit of Beloved, the child whose life Sethe saved from slavery, she finds herself confined to that "rememory" by giving herself to that spirit more and more as time progresses. Concerned for her life, Denver seeks help for her from those outside of 124. Even as the town women come to her aid, there is something essential about her condition that they just cannot see. This is all because in seeing Sethe they can only recognize themselves in her pain. "When Ella heard 124 was occupied by something-or-other beating up Sethe, it infuriated her and gave her another opportunity to measure what could very well be the devil himself against 'the lowest yet.' There was also something very personal in her fury. Whatever Sethe had done, Ella didn't like the idea of past errors taking possession of the present."[40] Ella gestures to save herself from the possibility of similar haunting yet in doing so the essential nature of Sethe's suffering still remains a suffering in which recognition is all her own. By refusing to see the suffering through Sethe's injury, through her individual markings, redressing her pain would still leave traces of silence.

Baby Suggs functions as the conduit figure that conjures the spirits of silence unfreedoms. She "talked as little as she could get away with because what was there to say that the roots of her tongue could manage?"[41] This is a characteristic she embodies through slavery and carries with her to "freedom." Baby Suggs refused to veil what slavery made her, deciding to reject her owner Mr. Garner's suggestion to refashion herself in "freedom" as "Jenny Whitlow." Instead she claims the violence of slavery as a position to mediate her words through. "Baby Suggs was all she had left of the 'husband' she claimed…. Now how could he find or hear tell of her if she was calling herself some bill-of-sale name?" [42] By marking her name as a connection to "the 'husband' she claimed," and the quotation marks matter here, it is important to note that she claims him but he is in essence

[40] Ibid., 302.
[41] Ibid., 166.
[42] Ibid., 168.

not "hers," he does not belong to her nor her to him. This relation signifies what Baby Suggs holds onto from slavery and what she carries through her foresight of slavery into "freedom." I argue her name and place in the world do not signify a connection to "the 'husband' she claims" as a spouse but marks a connection to her dispossessed status. Jenny Whitlow attempts to cover and dissociate her from slavery's violence under the auspices that she too can be remade and named like the Human beings of the world. Baby Suggs represents the deracination of the slave and the incoherence upon which both she and "the 'husband' she claims" are sustained. As Mr. Garner asserts, "Mrs. Baby Suggs ain't no name for a freed Negro,"[43] Baby Suggs valorizes this point by holding onto this name even as she responds to "anything but Suggs is what my husband name."[44] Suggs is slavery. She is not a free Negro and even as she believes "the 'husband' she claims" to have "made it," he is also not free. There is no structural proof that he exists in order to be free. He and Baby Suggs were not married, because by law they could not marry. He is also not the father, biologically or symbolically, of Halle. The only proof of his presence is that his bill-of-sale also says Whitlow, which would make them equally property of kin, not the inheritors of kinship status.[45]

My elongated introduction into Baby Suggs is a preface to get to the point of danger. For the purpose of my argument here, it is central to understand her constitution within the text to then mediate on the significance of her warning words. Denver recalls that "Grandma Baby said there was no defense" from white people as "they could prowl at will, change from one mind to another,

[43] Ibid., 167.
[44] Ibid.
[45] In *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects*, Christina Sharpe argues, "a narrative of injustice and captive desire comes to be hidden in a kinship narrative of freedom or access to it. Such claiming reveals a contemporary monstrous intimacy, on that in the name of freedom makes it more difficult, if not largely impossible, to speak either the history that is 'already seated in the chair in the empty room when one arrives' (Brand 2001, 25) or the contemporary conditions of ordinary brutality that compel one to want to occupy, either retrospectively or in the present, the space from which this inspiring story is the only story to be told," 20.

and even when they thought they were behaving, it was a far cry from what real humans did."[46] This same sentiment echoed in a silent warning Paul D desired to express to Denver, uttered in his thought, "Watch Out. Watch Out. Nothing in the world is more dangerous than a white school teacher."[47] Danger, in the context of the warning given by Baby Suggs, signifies a sense of potential but also unknowing. Words such as oppressive, racist, nasty, powerful, reactionary, aggressive, speak a since of finality in their declaration. These words present a conclusion of an inquiry of analysis. They symbolize knowing the repercussion of their diagnosis. They know what "happened" when and they know the "result" of it now. Danger on the other hand, foreshadows a looming violence that is hauntingly present and continuously unfolding in its manner.

The role whiteness plays in the danger of this historically still novel is in its refraction and absence. As Frank B. Wilderson, III argues in regards to whiteness, "unlike the negro, there is nothing homeostatic about the White (or other Humans). If the Black is death personified, the White is the personification of diversity, life itself."[48] The "diversity" of whiteness, as human life, means that is it manifold in excess of the actions of white people. It emerges in the constitution of meaning and how it is asserted and warned against in the text. The effects and implications of it are everywhere, nowhere, always possible and impossible. Though danger exists in everything, it bears asking if this danger is always of whiteness? Taken as example, Sethe's love for Denver is also marked by this danger. "Risky, thought Paul D, very risky. For a used-to-be-slave woman to love

[46] Morrison, *Beloved*, 287.
[47] Sabine Broeck also draws a connection between the important of the warnings given Baby Suggs and Paul D, in "Trauma, Agency, Kitsch and the Excesses of the Real: *Beloved* Within the Field of Critical Response," where she argues, "Baby Suggs admonition that there is 'no defense' (*Beloved* 245) against (white) evil or failure, but to know it and 'go on out the yard' (*Beloved* 245), that is, to live in worldliness in spite of its threat, is just as important a textual reservation vis-à-vis Denver's self-'uplift' as is Paul D's held back objection to Mrs. Bodwin's college plans for the girl: "Watch out. Watch out. Nothing in the world more dangerous than a white schoolteacher" (*Beloved* 266)," 8.
[48] Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 43.

anything that much was dangerous, especially if it were her children she had settled on to love."[49] What does it mean in this context to love a child as danger? How might we understand that this danger has a relation to whiteness but find the implications of it manifest in something else?

The fact that the danger emerges most pronounced through the slave, I argue symbolizes that danger is actually within Blackness, whiteness only functions as a proxy. Whiteness is danger amongst a host of other things. It seems the world, as a whole is dangerous, thus making all things within it and that emanate from it dangerous as well. The utterances of "a used-to-be-slave-woman to love anything that much is dangerous,"[50] "he *thought* he had made it safe, had gotten rid of the danger,"[51] "his order for them not to leave Sweet Home, except in his company, was not so much because of the law, but the danger of men-bred slaves on the loose"[52] "[Sethe] opens her eyes knowing the danger of looking at [Paul D],"[53] submerge the text. There is (Black) danger written onto every page yet whiteness only appears on a few. The danger Baby Suggs emerges from is of a (non)relation "to the 'husband' she claims" which is an arguably more critical relation than what Jenny Whitlow, as the product of a white authorized bill of sale, has the explanatory power to reveal.

The hands of Baby Suggs commission "the Clearing – a wide-open place cut deep in the woods nobody knew for what at the end of a path known only to deer and whoever cleared the land in the first place." The Clearing is a space of repletion where the same past continues to collide with the present. It is a conjuring of stark stillness.

> "Cry," she told them. "For the living and the dead. Just cry." And without covering their eyes the women let loose. It started that way: laughing children, dancing men, crying women

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[49] Morrison, *Beloved*, 54.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.,193; emphasis added.
[52] Ibid., 166.
[53] Ibid., 321.

and then it got mixed up. Women stopped crying and danced; men sat down and cried; children danced, women laughed, children cried until, exhausted and riven, all and each lay about the Clearing damp and gasping for breath.[54]

This spiritual awakening does not wash away but congeals. The context of this scene repeats. The Clearing is a reckoning with the confrontation of Black women, the precarious escape from sexual violence, and the dispossession of the power to name. Slavery is various acts of violence to Sethe. The most pernicious, gripping, and painfully deadening act for her was the stealing of her milk. Her milk is symbolic of the naming she must claim.

We are reintroduced to Sethe's milk but this time it is marked by blood.

"It's time to nurse your youngest," she said. Sethe reached up for the baby without letting the dead one go. Baby Suggs shook her head. "One at a time" she said and traded the living for the dead… Like rivals of the heart of the loved, they fought. Each struggling for the nursing child. Baby Suggs lost when she slipped in a red puddle and fell. So Denver too her mother's milk right along with the blood of her sister.[55]

The struggle for the power to claim Sethe's milk threads together the countless Black women throughout the text. When Sethe speaks out against her violation she is whipped and scarred, just as her mother once was with the undeniable marks of slavery. Denver and Beloved fight for the right to be mothered by Sethe. Beloved in death fights for the right of Sethe to claim infanticide as a mothering capacity. Denver struggles to live beyond the fact that she was not also killed and freed from the fury of this world.

"Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name. Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her, and

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[54] Ibid., 103.
[55] Ibid., 179.

even if they were, how can they call her if they don't know her name?"[56] Being marked, by the direct and indirect violence of sexual violations born of slavery, Sethe carries the silence of the markings on her flesh, as did her mother Baby Suggs, Denver by transfer from Sethe as her mother, Ella, and countless other Black female bodies, yet theoretically as scholars we are still in a position of trying to apprehend the structure of this suffering. We do not know all aspects of its grammar and in drawing attention to its structuring syntaxes does not mean that the grammar has spoken the gamete of its presence and the injuries it has caused have thus disappear.

Rememory is bigger than Sethe. It is about the women all around. The rememory of slavery and its sexual violence conditions the need to get all the children out no matter what. It is no coincidence that *Beloved* stages the scene of the milk taking during close the first chapter, channeling the metaphoric transfer of sexual violence by way of mothering capacities for the chapters to come. It takes away the ability to mother Black children into a state of protection against this same violence. Protection is barred making the realities of infanticide the only rightful choice. There is a labor around Sethe and the creation of her story that refuses a crowding out. It will not allow as the law has in *Gregson v. Gilbert* or countless other legal renderings, for slave invisibility to go unnoticed. "It was not a story to pass on."[57] Yet it is a story that must be passed on because there is too much that cannot be told. I, for one am haunted by the story of Ella.

> Sethe… told Denver that she believed Beloved had been locked up by some whiteman for his own purposes, and never let out the door. That she must have escaped to a bridge or someplace and rinsed the rest out of her mind. Something like that had happened to Ella except it was two men—a father and son—and Ella remembered every bit of it. For more

[56] Ibid., 323.
[57] Ibid., 323.

> than a year, they kept her locked in a room for themselves. "You couldn't think up," Ella had said, "what them two done to me."

Beloved is much more than the haunting of Sethe as a figure of an individual commission of infanticide. Beloved haunts the possibilities of Black mothering and Black gender. Yet, "remembering is otherwise"[58] and the sexual vicissitudes of slavery "disappear again as though nobody ever walked there."[59] The traces of this erasure are everywhere but the foundations were created aboard the slave ship. "Not the breath of the disremembered and unaccounted for, but wind in the eaves, or spring ice thawing too quickly. Just weather. Certainly no clamor for a kiss."[60] The slave ship and the capture of the Africans on board sans the implantation of romanticism into Black women's wombs, is the genesis of Black mothering made impossible. Black gender struggles to find its grammar within the ghosts[61] at the nexus of the feminization of slave ships, where the tales of the gendered and the engendered collide.

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[58] Ibid., 324.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] See, Frank B. Wilderson III, "Grammar & Ghost: The Performative Limits of African Freedom," *Theatre Survey* 50, no. 1 (2009), 119-25.

Structured Aphasia: Sexual Violence as the Mother Law of Slavery

> "Ursa, have you lost the blues?"
> "Naw, the blues is something you can't loose."
> – Gayl Jones, *Corregidora*

> Slavery made your mother into a myth, banished your father's name, and exiled your siblings to the far corners of the earth. The slave is an orphan, according to Frederick Douglass, even when he knew his kin…The only sure inheritance passed from one generation to the next was this loss and it defined the tribe. A philosopher had once described it as an identity produced by negation.
> – Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Across the Atlantic*

If the previous chapters allude to any specificities about Black gender, it is that there are no givens when thinking the harsh realities of such a designation. Yet Blackness is taken as already determined and underscored by so many attempts to devalue its explanatory power and the weight it reveals about the essential problems in the world. Black critical thinkers, in literature and theory, have struggled to work through the muck of what it means to engage Blackness from the place of its contradictions and the annuls of thought that are betrayed by the purviews of speech. This chapter is no different as it labors to provide credence to demarcations that in form complicate even the most left situated political understandings of gender and its relationship to sexual violence. What is produced here refuses to think gender as separate from sexual violence as a paradigm, from antiblackness as the force of all reason. In that respect, Gayl Jones gifts the world with a text so explicit in its engagement with the violence at the heart of Blackness. *Corregidora* refuses to apologize for what it cannot, will not, make sense of and disallows the vulgarity and putridness of what it puts forth to sit easily on the palates of those who turn its pages. *Corregidora* is situated within a tradition of Black feminist writing that rejects one-for-one descriptions of gender that reduce Black gendered subjugation to that of patriarchy alone, as most theories of gender so aptly rely. Instead these theorists ask critical questions about how Blackness has an explanatory power from within that reveals remarkable tales of the itemization of the body through deracinating forms of violence that

make the appearance and invisibility of "identifying" categories more power wielding than the modes of will and desire.

To be engendered and gendered are two separate positionalities. Just as to be property, to possess property, and to be free of property status are relegated to different poles within the constitution of the world. What then does it mean to be gendered property? If property is gendered to whom does such a designation impart recognition? A mediation on gender is an attempt at ascertaining the philosophical preoccupation with knowing the truth of what it means to be a suffering subject. Black gender then confronts this narrative with a structural impossibility. Blackness as object cannot refract gender as subject. That is to say, the terms Black and gender cannot come together to bring credence to a subjugated object. In fact, such is an ethical dilemma. Slavery as a force engendered modernity with relations of being and nonbeing that challenge the narrative that gender can or ever should be taken as a face value association. When Blackness and gender come into conversation this nexus confronts the context of a world born of flesh that engendered the marketplace of identification. To render Black gender as either objectified object or objectifying object misplaces the focus and force of power. Thus such associations assume that Black gender is a question of Blackness pointed inwards at Black people.

Instead, I argue that concerns with Black gender are reflective of an arrangement of property. As critical Black feminists have illustrated, to think gender as outside of Blackness is to attempt to usher Blackness into a conversation its assumed to not be associated with.[1] The maneuver to bring Blackness up to speed with theories of being, to which it is somehow always assumed to be delayed, is far more than a misnomer but central to the violence inherent to Blackness. The problem with the idea that Blackness needs to be brought into the gender

[1] See Hortense J. Spillers, "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words," *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003).

conversation is that it is a misaligned association of terms. Black and gender are not two separate designations. The demarcations of difference with respect to the project of gender and sexuality studies are inherent within the violence that produces the very category of Blackness. To put this another way, Blackness is marked by gender and sexuality in its instantiation, both terms are locked within the constitutive elements of the fungibility and accumulation of property.[2] The belief that Blackness can ever be devoid of a gendered analysis is an accusation put forth to levy the subject concerns of beings in contradistinction to property. Black gender becomes mired to the gender designations of others, making the specificities of Black gender arrangement captive to the desires of inauguration of identifying subject terms. What the historical record of slavery makes clear is the branding of gender onto property involved a violent arrangement of power. Yet, the scant traces of deliberate historical engagements with the meaning of Black gender under the conditions of slavery are not lost upon those who labor to theorize if and what Black gender has the possibility to mean in the present.

The literary space offers a place for reimagining the contested and scant evidence of the archive. *Corregidora* as a text allows for an engagement with sexual violence in a context outside of and in excess to the logics of singular experience. While sexual violence can be and has been largely theorized as a terrorizing facet of Black life under slavery, the point here is to ascertain how the imaginative labor of the literary form gestures towards marking sexual violence as a paradigm of relations between Blackness and subjectivity. The intention here is to not assert *Corregidora* as a pure renderings of historical and theoretical ruminations on slavery. Instead the intent is to hone in on the contradictions of what the content of the novel can and cannot do in terms of retracing history and furthermore to wallow in the inconsistencies that arise from the very necessity of being forced

[2] See Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997)

to imagine a history that is present and absent, silent and pervasive simultaneously. This is to demonstrate both how *Corregidora* succeeds and fails, not by the fault of Jones, but by the assumptive framings and narratives constraints of attempting to write a story so grandiose it structurally cannot be told in totality, not even the realm of the imaginary. From there I ask, what does it mean or can it mean politically that a history of sexual violence and its implications on Black existence must be imagined unsuccessfully? How do we grapple with the seriousness of sexual violence as a force over Blackness that renders it illegible and gratuitously open for intrusion, without immediately retreating into the recourse of possibility and alterity as optimism?

My intention in privileging sexual violence is to point to the pervasiveness of how the Black body is marked and violated through sexuality. Yet the social and political implications of this marking in the present are not simply unspoken but I argue they cannot be spoken because of how the 'evidence' was buried and in what respects it appears. As Mama, the mother to the protagonist Ursa in *Corregidora,* explains to Ursa about the spectacular nature of violence towards slaves, "…all them beating and killing wasn't nothing but sex circuses, and all them white peoples, mens, womens, and childrens crowding around to see…"[3] In explicit candor Mama opens the line of thought to think the sexual implications of all forms of violence enacted upon Black bodies. The sexual and gendered (mens, womens, and childrens) realms of being are locked within the violent avenues with which identity emerges though the libidinal economy[4] of philic and phobic associations with Blackness.

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[3] Gayl Jones, *Corregidora* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 125.
[4] For an in-depth introspection into the libidinal economy, "affective formation," of antiblackness, See Jared Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008)

Recasting Black Women in History in Fact and Fiction

Sojourner Truth so famously uttered the words "Aren't I a woman?" recounted by feminists many times over. Or did she in fact utter the words "a'n't I a woman" or "ain't I a woman" or "ar'n't I a woman?" In posing this expression several times, the context of a phrase so widely known is drawn into question as the cadence of speech is harkened over to assure that respect is paid to the true form Truth intended those words to be spoken, and the call of its questioning to be heard. However, the truth behind the historical accuracy of Truth's famous speech only touches upon one of many critical missteps in how this feminist figure has become represented in space and time. Truth is situated at the cusp of a problematic, was she a feminist folk shero so brave to stand as an emancipated slave before a congregation of white suffragists at the 1851 Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio and speak her truths as a Black woman? Or was she one figure in a legacy of Black feminists/womanists who have written and spoken against the current that assumes the word woman can ever be taken as a self-evident designation free of structural arrangements of power? I argue, Truth cannot be both, and in fact the nexus of her presence in the historical record speaks to a gendered divide that cannot be equally Black, white, and in color.

Did she even speak the word woman at all? To ask such draws out more than a play on semantics determined by race, experience, and place in the world. The focus on how Truth may have enunciated the words "aren't I a woman" is situated quite differently that an introspection into the word woman itself. The former places concern on respect for the individual speaking, to give space for their personal coming to being and self-presentation in a political manner. However, the problematic of the latter draws into question how we may even begin to think what the word woman has the possibility to mean. Whether or not Truth spoke the word is up for debate given that the historical record of her speech is riddle with white feminist politics. As Cheryl I. Harris, a Critical Race Theory scholar explains, Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of Uncle Tom's Cabin, and

France Dana Gage, a feminist abolitionist, each authored two separate and competing versions of Truth's speech. The argument about the discordant perceptions and accounts of who Truth was and what she said rest within the irreconcilability and contradictions inherent in her legacy, which is presented in feminist historiography as the representation of Black female plight under slavery. Harris argues, "how they wrote what Truth said tells us not only what was said but about how they saw her and how they heard her."[5] Stating further, "while she was an active agent in the project of inventing her persona, prevailing racial and gender hierarchies significantly shaped her image to conform with certain underlying assumptions about Black women in ways that constrained and submerged her own self-projections."[6] Thus in the same respect, the argument here is not to deny Truth the right as an agent of her speech but to look at how power defines and presents the truth history tells.

What Harris reveals in her comparison of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Bundle, the Frances Dana Gage, and Harriett Beecher Stowe versions of the Truth speech is that there is a long mediation over Black women's bodies that is wrought with politics not about exorcising understandings of the position of Black women in society but about the elevation of other's concerns. The Ohio Anti-Slavery Bundle account of Truth's speech was published the same year it was given 1851 as a journalistic account of what was occurring on the abolitionist frontlines, however Stowe's publication came ten years later and Gage's 12 years later in response to Stowe. Harris critically asks why wait so long to publish these accounts? In essence Harris concludes that neither Stowe, nor Gage, whose account has been taken largely as most accurate, were concerned with Truth and a conversation on Black womanhood but instead with the proliferation of their own careers. Yet the

[5] Cheryl I. Harris, "Finding Sojourner's Truth: Race, Gender, and the Institution of Property," *Cordoza Law Review* 18 (1996): 360.
[6] Ibid.

power of their pens removed this knowledge from what was written about Truth and her speech by their hands, so that the readers of their accounts are not confronted with their egocentric white feminist racism and use of Truth as "feminist mammy," to quote Harris, a figure at their own disposal. Harris notes Stowe described Truth as a "full-blooded African," a completely inaccurate account, "[who] in early youth must have been as fine a specimen of the torrid zone of Cumberworth's celebrated statuette of the Negro Woman at the Fountain"[7] and Gage illustrates her as "a tall woman in a 'white turban' and an 'uncouth sunbonnet,' selling a 'narrative of her own strange adventurous life … "'a glorious mother,' who 'had taken us up in her strong arms and carried us safely over the slough of difficulty turning the whole tide in our favor."[8] Both accounts harp on the physical differences of Truth's body, relegating her as an asexualized, "feminist mammy," from which only difference is to be found.

The question of how Truth pronounced woman, both in speech and in experiential rendering, was lost upon the concerns of how this historical moment and this historical figure was marked and put forth in the world by these accounts. Harris argues that "it is only as a white woman that truth is able to speak,"[9] which is a point that is not simply about a mishandling of Truth's legacy but about the structural implications of "having property and being property."[10] Black womanhood, and Black gender more broadly, is held captive to the position of being property and "to be property is to be rendered an object, as that which is less than human, as a thing, as fungible, as a commodity, degraded and devalued under a private regime or oppression enforced by state power."[11] To quote Harris further,

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[7] Ibid., 373.
[8] Ibid., 386.
[9] Ibid., 383.
[10] Ibid., 386.
[11] Ibid.

> slavery as a system of property did not only structure race: it configured and structured the social and legal boundaries of both race and gender. Indeed, slavery was the primordial site of the production of racial patriarch. Racial patriarchy describes the social, political, economic, legal, and conceptual system that entrenched the ideology of white supremacy and white male control over women's reproduction and sexuality. This system operating by subordinating all black people along lines that were articulated with and through gender, and all women along lines that were articulated within and through race.[12]

Truths legacy collides with the dramatic weight of slavery. The realities of her life, not a still figure for replication and dissemination as a moment in time, but as a someone whose historical reality speaks to why gender for Blackness does not and cannot mean what it does for others. The very women Truth spoke before, are the same women who failed to hear her cries for help when her son was sold into slavery to which she vowed "I'll have my child again."[13] The silence of her inability to have her child, to save him from slavery, was muddled by the overbearing desire to draw her into a community of women with women whose positions in the world makes it so the status of their relationship to the term woman will never have to endure what it means to be gendered for the captor. Harris argues, "[u]nder slavery, much as Sojourner Truth was legally presumed not to control her body or herself because she was a Black woman – indeed she was excluded from property ownership because under law she was herself a form of property – neither her own speech nor her own persona was clearly perceived or treated as 'hers'" (4). The lack of concern Harris displays with repairing the history that "separates us from [Truth]" is a crucial position of thought to inhabit, in order to interrogate the processes with which a figure like Truth is made so hyper-present yet remains so structurally buried at the same time. Yet, Truth is not anomalous in her presentation, she

[12] Ibid., 311-12.
[13] Ibid., 325-6.

represents the complex toils of Black gender, slavery, and the usurped mediation on the latter two terms by the political will and desire of having and maintaining property.

What the story of Truth helps to situate is the manner in which the archive of Black women and their experiences are approached for the purposes of allegorical associations. As the exegesis of Truth's misshapen legacy by Harris reveals is that access to an archive with respect to the experiences of slaves is a contested terrain. The contentions that arise around how and whether Truth expressed herself as a woman bring forth the contradictions surrounding the proclamation of slave identity. The terms used to designate gender specifications, have no face value implications for the conditions of existence when confronted with the opacity of Black life under slavery and its afterlife. Political and social arrangements must undergo the heavy lifting to make sense of how Blackness and gender are situated outside of the arbitrary designations of such terms as man and/or woman, masculine and/or feminine gender. The approach requires a rejection of such terms all together as duality and binary associations misalign focus and impact when engaging the truth of a gender paradigm. Instead, thinking primarily through the designation of the slave as object property and also with respect to the violence the slave was subjected to, as the site of memory[14] is where we can begin to grasp the contradictions and peculiarity of what gender can mean, or if it can mean, with respect to Blackness.

On Being the Blues without Possession

There is no slavery without sexual depravity

– Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves*

[14] See Toni Morrison, "The Site of Memory," *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir.* ed. William Zinsser, (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1987), 103-123.

Mediating on the politics of Black women's sexuality, Hortense Spillers asserts that white feminisms approach Black feminist and Black queer theories as if "black women are the beached whales of the sexual universe, unvoiced, misseen, not doing, awaiting *their* verb."[15] For Spillers this arises through a "sheer romance of the blues" a vantage that imposes an interpretation onto the self-representation of Black women's performances without heeding to historical and political formations, while also noting that there has been attempt to broach that silence, sometimes by the male-authored hand. As such Spillers reads Calvin Hernton's *Sex and Racism in America* as an indicative text of the structural relegation of Black women as "a creature of sex, but sexuality touches her no where."[16] Spillers acknowledges Hernton's attempt at speaking to the gapping silence about the "ordeal" which manifest the silent tale of Black women's existence which to him has "yet to be written" but there is a discord between how the silence is marked and traced.

For Hazel Carby, the attention paid by Spillers to white feminisms is a misnomer to paying critical respects to the "the production of a discourse of sexuality by black women."[17] Through an analysis of the blues privileging "the sexual and cultural politics of black women who constructed themselves as sexual subjects through song"[18] Carby asserts an empowered subject presence emerges upon which Black women provide voice to their historical positioning with respect to feminism, sexuality and power. As such in response to Spillers, Carby states "As black women we have provided articulate and politically incisive criticism which is there for the feminist community at large to heed or to ignore—upon that decision lies the future possibility of forging a feminist

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[15] Spillers, "Interstices," 153
[16] Ibid., 155.
[17] Hazel Carby, "It Just Be's That Way Sometimes: The Sexual Politics of Black Women's Blue," *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, ed. Robert G. O'Meally, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 469.
[18] Ibid., 470.

movement that is not parochial.[19]" However, I question if the perspective of Spillers is in fact parochial? Does perspective toward the white feminist relation with Black women's bodies discredit the voices of Black women's self-definition thus providing credence where none (or little) should be paid?

The fact that "The records of the women blues singers were likewise directed at a black audience through the establishment of 'race records,' a section of the recording industry which recorded both religious and secular black singers and black musicians and distributed these recordings through stores in black areas: they were rarely available in white neighborhoods"[20] leads Carby to conclude that

> This then is the framework within which I interpret the women blues singers of the twenties. To fully understand the ways in which their performance and their songs were part of a discourse of sexual relations within the black community, it is necessary to consider how the social conditions of black women were dramatically affected by migration, for migration had distinctly different meanings for black men and women.[21]

The project here is an excavation, or presentation, of Black women as the purveyors of their sexual politics as speaking and acting subjects. Furthermore, the intraracial dynamics of Black blues women and their lives are centered here as the primary site upon which critical knowledges about their sexuality and politics take root.

What is emergent in the seemingly divergent responses of Carby, to focus on the intra-Black politics of Black women's sexuality and of Spiller's to look at the textual silences about the existence of Black women's sexuality by white feminist theories, is what Jared Sexton has referred to as "the

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[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid., 474.
[21] Ibid.

social life of social death," where neither position exists and can be explored without the existence of the other. It is a representative conflict within Black Studies with regard to how to approach the *problem*, but the constitution of the problem is what is ever looming. Sexton explains this presumed difference, looking from within versus from without, is in fact a *relation not an antagonism*, though can present as a conflict, stating that "social death might be thought of as another name for slavery and an attempt to think about what it comprises, and social life, then, another name for freedom and an attempt to think about what it entails."[22] Both engagements with Black women's sexuality tend to a model upon which Blackness is tethered to a larger structural relation that produces their lived realities as Carby explores, and their theoretical presences and absences within the academe and society writ large via Spillers.

While Spillers does not provide a direct response to Carby, her interpretation of Hernton's work inadvertently produces a response to this belief and off sets Carby's assertion that Spiller is simply "complaining" about the profound absence of a theoretic of Black women's sexuality within the white feminist paradigm. The absence is in fact a structural appendage that broaches realms of existence beyond that of Black women alone. For Spillers it is a misstep to assert that for Black women "[t]heir enslavement relegated them to the marketplace of flesh" creating a condition so totalizing in its force that "the daughters labor even now under the outcome." While this may seem to be the crux of the condition it misses the root of the central concern held by Black feminine gender. The constitution of Blackness and the structure of gendering places Black women as the counterpoint to the formation of existence itself. As Spillers argues,

> She became instead the principal point of passage between the human and the non-human world. Her issue because the focus of a cunning difference – visually, psychologically,

[22] Jared Sexton, "The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism," *InTensions* 5 (2011): 17.

> ontologically – as the route by which the dominant modes decided the distinction between human and "other." In other words, the black person mirrored for the society around her what a human being was *not*. Through this stage of bestial, the act of copulation travels eons because culture incorporates it, before the concept of sexuality can reclaim and "humanize" it. Neither the picture I am drawing here, nor its symbolic interpretation, is unheard of to our understanding of American and New World history. If, however, it is a stunning idea in its ritual repetition, nonetheless, then that is because the black female remains exotic, her history transformed into a pathology turned back on the subject in tenacious blindness.[23]

What Spillers highlights is that the "black woman," a trope and figure, conjoins the violent production of Blackness with the Human world. As Spillers has stated elsewhere, with reference to Black feminine gender, "My country needs me and if I were not here, I would have to be invented,"[24] this descriptor I argue can be applied more broadly to the constitution of being itself, not solely that production of nationhood. Thus, the silences in white feminist discourse about Black gender and sexuality that propel Spillers to write "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words" isn't an attempt at an addition or a recognition of Black women as sexual beings but is a critical questioning about why and how other gendered and sexual appearance emerge through and by way of this structural silencing. It bares stating that yes in fact in this calculation Black women are gendered and have sexualities but to call for recognition or celebration of such demarcations as the corrective for silences, absences, or misrecognitions is part and parcel to the logic the call attempts to upend. The response must heed to why absences and silences appear in the first instance. This is not "fault" of the attempt to bring credence to Blackness as a gendered and sexually complex. It is however the

[23] Spillers, "Interstices," 155-6.
[24] Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003), 203.

function of Blackness, as a paradigm upon which accumulation and fungibility are all that can greet it. My point is to say, Spillers opens a Pandora's box by bringing Blackness, gender, and sexuality to the forefront of a theoretical conversation using the figure of the Black women as the place to think through the classifications of difference at the level of body and performance.

Blackness in all its instantiations exists as that for others, as what Saidiya Hartman has termed as an a dual invocation.[25] This designation places Blackness at the crawl of others desires making it so that self-determination and the performances of individual Black people do not function to define the category as such. In "The Paradox of Silence and Display: Sexual Violation of Enslaved Women and Contemporary Contradictions in Black Female Sexuality," Dorothy Roberts brings this duality of Black womanhood into startling view. Roberts argues:

> The sexual exploitation of enslaved women and girls, and the degrading mythology that supported it, continues to affect black female sexuality today. The dichotomy between the intrinsic depravity of Jezebel and asexual respectability of Mammy reverberates in the pervasive display of black women's bodies… at the same time black women's sexual desires, pleasures, and decision making remain largely hidden.[26]

What Roberts exposes is that Black female gender and sexuality are made to embody the extremities of sexuality and asexuality. Through this relation Black female sexuality is produced as opposition, as negation of itself. The impulse to argue against either constitution using the logics of gender produced as distinctly nonblack, can only think the destruction of Black gender and sexual suffering by asserting its right for presence where it is absence and its right for absence where it is present.

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[25] Hartman introduces this concept by arguing, "The tensions generated by the law's dual invocation of property and person, or by 'full enjoyment' and limited protection to life and limb, were masked by the phantasmal ensnaring agency of the lascivious black," 87.

[26] Dorothy Roberts, "The Paradox of Silence and Display: Sexual Violation of Enslaved Women and Contemporary Contradictions in Black Female Sexuality," in *Beyond Slavery: Overcoming Its Religious and Sexual Legacies*, ed. Bernadette J. Brooten (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 46.

Essentially gender in this sense can only think freedom through distinction by asserting the body into what it is not, however what Roberts displays is that the Black female is and is not every form of being at the same time. The "truth" of Black sexuality becomes submerged between and underneath the valences of what it is and what it is not.

Roberts goes on to argue, "the asexual Mammy and hypersexual Jezebel work together to suppress Black women's own liberated sexual ethics that reflect their perspectives, values, and humanity. Slavery's stereotypes linking natural Black femaleness to sexual promiscuity and Black respectability to sexlessness leave a crippled cultural language of Black women to define an alternative sexual ethics."[27] I argue the implications of this point extend further. What emerges from the dichotomizing of Black female sexuality into negation is the inability to mark what is distinctively Black about this structure. What is grafted onto Black women's bodies are conditions of sexual agency that are not available to the slave sexuality. To this point, Roberts argues "There is a significant difference between the Mammy/Jezebel dichotomy and the Madonna/whore dichotomy, which helps to police white women's sexual behavior. Black sexuality is defined as *inherently* and *essentially* immoral; the Black female body represents promiscuity."[28] Roberts is working against the belief that Mammy/Jezebel is produced as a response to the performance of gender like the Madonna/Whore functions for white women. What Roberts asserts it that dichotomy of Black female sexuality is not deployed to "police behavior" but instead as a marking and designation that situates Blackness into a void. As such, this brings the argument back to my instance on thinking Blackness as gender and sexuality because Blackness epitomizes the structure of these categories at the level of its constitution.

[27] Ibid., 51.
[28] Ibid.

Ursa the protagonist in *Corregidora* breathes context into the void of existence produced by way of the violence of sexuality. Ursa sings the blues. However, her performance as such is not what gives *Corregidora* its imaginative power when displaying and attempting to mediate the constitution of Ursa's being. In this respect, I will rephrase my introduction to this complex protagonist by saying instead, Ursa is the blues. Exclaiming to her then husband, Mutt, "I said I didn't sing to be supported. I said I sang because it was something I had to do, but he never would understand that."[29] She is speaking to a positionality in which Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka) describes as "blues people," blues emanating from "slavery, and it is from that 'peculiar institution,' as it was known euphemistically, that blues did find its particular form."[30] Slavery however does not disintegrate, it haunts the present by structuring the social positionality of modernity. Its wheels of machinations of violence keep turning. "And if slavery dictated certain aspects of blues form and content, so did the so-called emancipation and it subsequent problems dictate the path blues would take."[31] Ursa marks the visible merging of the vestiges of slavery and the hysterical longing of what to make of and how to rid its power from the present.

The surname Corregidora is bore onto Ursa by way of Portuguese enslaver who owned and fathered multiple generations of her maternal lineage in Brazil. Corregidora, described as a whoremonger, owned Great Gram, with whom he fathered Gram, with whom he fathered Mama who birthed and mothered Ursa. This relation ever so complex and vexing as Ursa explains,

> My great-grandmama told my grandmama the part she lived through that my grandmama didn't live through and my grandmama told my mama what they both lived through and my mama told me what they all lived through and we were supposed to pass it down like that

[29] Jones, *Corregidora*, 3
[30] Leroi Jones, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, (New York: Perennial, 1963), 50.
[31] Ibid, 50-1.

> from generation to generation to generation so we'd never forget. Even though they'd burned everything to play like it didn't never happen. Yeah, and where's the next generation?[32]

To respond to this familial relation with shock and awe would be to view the genealogical birth of Ursa as an incestuous scandal, one that unearths the foundation of the family. However, the politics of what happened and how Ursa came to be, take on a different political meaning and urgency when approached through a Black feminist lens that troubles conceptions of kinship by reading slavery as a paradigmatic structure that sutures the politics of social relations. What does kinship mean for the slave, when property status supersedes the status of familial relations? If incest is the scandal of patriarchal lineage, what then can incest mean for property bore from the status of the mother law?

The particularities of what makes Ursa a blues woman thread a complex terrain of invisible markers that assent her into a position inhabited by a yearning to be an assertion. She is stripped of this right to exist without caveats, muddled explanations, or excavated buried histories. Ursa's placement in the text as a blues singer, by Jones, must be taken as a deliberate political position. To mark the protagonist, a woman born of the incestuous ontological violence of slavery, as a purveyor of Black women's blue lends critical perspective to the reader. By singing the blues, Ursa inhabits the contradictions of an existence that is political before it is personal. Descending from a transnational history of slavery, rape, sex work, incest, escape, and immigration, Ursa resides in Kentucky where she performs as a blues singer at Happy's Café. We are introduced to her in violence, by way of an assault or an accident, which pushes her or assists her in falling down a flight of stairs. The details of this encounter are unclear, however what is evident is the exchange with Mutt results in Ursa suffering a miscarriage and a subsequent hysterectomy. The politics of this seemingly personal loss,

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[32] Jones, *Corregidora*, 9.

weighs heavy on Ursa, and arguably the reader, as she seeks to make sense of and rectify her place in the world.

The blues brings forth the convergence of, what appears in form as personal, and its instantiations in broader political contexts. As Angela Y. Davis argues, "sexuality is not privatized in the blues. Rather, it is represented as shared experience that is socially produced" (Davis 91). To view Ursa as anomaly would be to relegate her family's history to a status that divorces it from the vast realities of slavery. The sexual relations that rendered Blackness as property were both lawless and lawful at the same time. The strictures of moral and assumed social codes need not apply to the slave, and were deracinated and upheld by political forces that made any and every form of engagement with slave bodies possible. Furthermore, the political forces that weigh on the historical and contemporary record disallow a congruent reading of what appears and disappears with regards to the status of Blackness. Thus sexuality cannot be read by the defining lines of love and lust, consent and rape as such lines are blurred when the overarching concern is the maintenance of the property relation. The blues as a status of existence counters the historical and contemporary silences about what Blackness can mean, and theorizes from the position of the unthought offering at times insight into the unseen and unspoken contradiction of what it means to inhabit a space that cannot be. Davis posits, "the blues as aesthetic form and practice must be understood as a means of testifying to and registering the lack of real, objectively attainable possibilities of social transformation."[33] However, the blues is not pure form, nor is its uncontested testimony. What is available in the blues is generative insight into what it means to "be a problem," as Du Bois so famously rhetorically posed. "When the blues 'name' problems the community wants to overcome, they help create the emotional conditions for protest, but do no and could not, of themselves,

[33] Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacy and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma: Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 106.

constitute social protest."[34] The blues illuminates the contradictions of Blackness, and the blues woman, as Ursa appears, draws the contradictions of gender and sexuality into closer view.

Discussing Ma Rainey's performance of "Chain Gang Blues," Davis points to the fact that "black women were not exempt by virtue of their gender"[35] from extreme forms of physical punishment assumed as designated solely for men. In the lyric, Rainey can be heard repeating "It was early this morning that I had my trial" going on to say "Ninety days on the country road and the judge didn't even smile."[36] Rainey speaking, of course, about being sentences to ninety days on the chain gang, a form of punishment often referred to as harsher than slavery given that the state had no investment in preserving the lives of convict labors as slave owner did for their slave property.[37] Davis cites Sandra Lieb in highlighting that the sheet music includes the unperformed lines "Ain't robbed no train, ain't done no hanging crime/ But the judge said I'd be on the country road a long, long time"[38] which draws forth the specifics of punishment for Blacks that was rendered regardless of guilt or innocents and furthermore regardless of gender. What Davis presents is a performative tendency in Black women's blues to speak to the paralleling treatment of Black women and Black men post emancipation. Furthermore, it points to shared treatment and structural alignment of the constitutive elements of Blackness that forgo gender protections, or caveats, in favor of like designation and treatments.

The repressed hysteria manifest in Ursa throughout the novel to make sense of the urgings bestowed onto her to bear children, I argue is reflective of the political positioning of Blackness in

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[34] Ibid., 113.
[35] Ibid., 103.
[36] Ibid.
[37] In *Are Prisons Obsolete,* Davis writes, "In the immediate aftermath of slavery, the southern states hastened to develop a criminal justice system that could legally restrict the possibilities of freedom for newly released slaves. Black people became the prime targets of a developing convict lease system, referred to by many as a reincarnation of slavery," 29.
[38] Davis, *Blues Legacies*, 103.

the world writ large. The political calls to address and/or do something with the state of Blackness, to make sense of it to apprehend its logical framings, similar to the urges felt by Ursa, are productive of a legacy of sexual intrusion onto Black life. The point is to assert that the open status of Blackness, as open for and assumedly welcoming to constant naming, placing, reconfiguring, and definition, finds it roots in the marking of Black flesh as open to and available for sexual marking, mutilation and abuse under slavery. Black life is so wholly invaded that is cannot be constructed without the violence, yet the violence is refracted across varying terrains of life it becomes a structural impossibility to conclusively name it. What we see through an examination of sexual violence, in the literary insistence on revisiting the historical, is a marking of Black existence as presently subjected to the violence of these same desires. Considering the congruency in treatment experienced by Black women and men that the larger structural implications of how these bodies are situated in society is in fact along a similar axis, what then does this say about the tenor of hyper sexualization of Black women's bodies often spoke about in Black women's blues performances? Is there something to be said about how these tales of sex and sexualization figure Black women and arguably Black gendered subjects en masse, even as similar pronouncements are missing from blue performances by Black men? Lastly, if we are to think about the blues as an allegory for the structure of antiblackness and blue performances as utterances that provide purview into the often contradictory classification of Blackness, could sexualization with respect to Black women as a blues theme speak to a grander narrative of the coalescing of the very thing we call Blackness, regardless of demarcations across gendered lines?

If we return to Ursa as the blues, not simply as a posturing performer, but as someone whose life speaks to the what Jones (Baraka) marked as a paradigmatic structure of violence rather than simple aesthetic form, then her relationship to sexualization speaks a different tone about interrelations of sex, gender, and Blackness. Following her hysterectomy Ursa takes up residences

with Catherine, Cat, who assists in nursing her back to health. Ursa having divorced Mutt, chooses to stay here following her time in the hospital, and keeps her whereabouts from him. After an encounter with Jeffy, a young girl also taken in by Cat, where Jeffy threatens to tell Mutt where Ursa is staying, Ursa and Cat engage in a conversation that causes Ursa to unearth thoughts and feelings about the power surrounding her body. Overhearing the confrontation between the two, Cat comes in to see what the noise is about. Ursa refuses to honestly say why she'd kicked Jeffy out her bed, instead telling Cat "She started feeling on me all up and around here and I knocked her off on the floor"[39] prompting them to engage in a conversation channeled by an ambivalence and silence about Jeffy being "like that," presumably lesbian. Though as candid as both Ursa and Cat are with their speech, neither say anything directly about this claim. They move past and through the topic of same-gender love making their way to another topic entirely.

Ursa goes on to tell Cat "I don't think I can stay here" with Cat responding "I make sure Jeffy done even look at you while you here." Ursa replies, "It ain't that... I shouldn't stay here" to which Cat responds "You wont to be over there where that nigger is, don't you?" Ursa doesn't deny or validate this notion, saying instead "I expect to start back to work in a day or two." Ursa unsure if she has lost the ability to sing questions whether she will be good or not, Cat assures her "You be just as good." Ursa drawn back to her injury replies, "They didn't say anything about my throat. They didn't say it did anything to my throat." Cat then realizes Ursa hadn't sung since the night she fell/was pushed. Ursa for the first time begins to sing "*Trouble in mind, I'm blue, but I won't be won't be blue always*," she stops and with Cat's encouragement finishes the song. However, something is different about her voice and delivery. Cat suggests, "Your voice sounds a little stained" but Ursa does not take offense. She sees this as a new insight stating, "Not for the worse. Like Ma, for

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[39] Jones, *Corregidora*, 39.

instance, after all the alcohol and men, the strain made it better, because you could tell what she'd been through. You could hear what she'd been through."[40] Ursa insists her worry is different than her mother's because she does not have to worry about men yet this conversation sends her deep into her thoughts which are clear and confused, calm and angry.

"What she said about the voice being better because it tells what you've been through. Consequences… Shit, we're all consequences of something. Stained with another's past as well as your own. Their past in my blood. I'm a blood."[41] To this point, we know the sexually violent story of Ursa's maternal lineage, the blood of her past, but the blood that she is in the present is unclear. The murkiness of her position in the world is riddled with sex, violence, trauma, and a compulsive relationship with the past. The text labors to make sense of what of these prevailing issues in Ursa's life are consequences of the past or present, or are they perhaps somehow all constitutive of the past's presence in the present.

We still do not know what brings this forth into Ursa's existence. Is it the fact that it happened, the fact that records were burned, or her inability to remove the stain? The text doesn't labor to provide easy answers to any of these curiosities. The text in fact says nothing. *Corregidora,* like the blues, utters Ursa's "consequences" yet says nothing about what they mean. The text itself is littered with a litany of responses that say nothing. Elaboration is needed to provide context to the many things that those speaking and Ursa thinking "say nothing" in response to. *Corregidora* is fashioned in the tradition of the blues because it tells and describes the traumas of antiblackness without seeking an easy prescriptive escape from the violence by attempting to ameliorating and soften it with fleeting meanings. To give the violence value could only gesture to reduce the gravity of what is put forth as the text of Ursa and her existence. The records have been burned, made

[40] Ibid., 44.
[41] Ibid., 45.

inaccessible to the script of the world, however the truth of what thrusts Ursa into being is what gives the world its orbit and modes of reasoning. The ability to narrate reality and draw conclusions from what is uttered is predicated on power. The existence of such operates by and through the very mechanisms of violence that Ursa is trying to live against and the weight of such requires a world shifting scope of analysis. It is not by accident or choice that Ursa does not speak and says nothing when something is expected to be said. Instead it is the inability to reason into existence the totality of violence that produced a condition that all logic says cannot exist, that produces the caesura in sound.

The scandal here is bigger than the incest taboo. In fact, the incest taboo with respect to Ursa, Mama, Gram, and Great Gram is phantasmagoric. To apply such to their narrative would have to assume their history, and the burned record, is theirs alone and it is not. The burned record is that of the traces of slavery and its relationship to creating the modern world. Recounting to Ursa their genesis, Mama says,

> *I never told you how Great Gram had Gram. She through she had to go to the toilet, and then something told her to go outside to the outhouse like she was going to, and then she squats down on the chamber pot. And then that's how she had your Gram, coming out in the slop jar. That's how we all begin, remember that. That's how we all begin.*[42]

The mother law of slavery birthed all slaves into shit. The story of these women is one story of many that defy logics of familial and social relations produced by applications of sexual violence that are in fact incalculable. To respond with shock to the obsessive compulsive need of Ursa to remember these stories requires that the stories belong solely to her. It also must assume that this is the story of a family. However, they are the stories of slavery, and cannot be possessed by Ursa and

[42] Ibid., 41, emphasis in original.

her mothers. The violent sexual toils of slavery do not simply resurrect the (in)ability to retell and recast this story into the life of others, its totalizing unconstrained violence can also recoup scenarios with further complications and further acts of sexual repulsion. This is not to minimize the weight of Ursa and her maternal lineage but to contextualize it as part and parcel to a system built on the sexual violation of the slave. Incest doesn't exist for the slave as incest is a taboo of those granted status as familial subjects. The issue, here is not that incest does not matter but that incest is the only scandal that can elicit a coherent response, outrage, and prescriptive gesture to move forward from. If Ursa were not born of incest would she be free? Incest is a scandal of human category, what is the scandal of Blackness. Well Blackness itself is the scandal, the blues, but what is to be done about that which rests in silence. Slavery and sexual perversion are synonymous and the inability to narrate the consequences of such is branded into the social and political fabric of society.

Incest becomes the stand in for a lack. The fact that incest can elicit a coherent response, outrage, and prescriptive gesture to move forward, in a way that slavery cannot speaks to the structure of political silences. For incest to matter for Ursa, it would have to be taken as self-evident truth that the reproductive capacities all female gendered bodies were created as equal. Sexual violence as the condition of natal life for property, is where will and injury converge, distorting the relation between violence and desire as well as past, present, and future time. It is in the nature of what cannot be said about sexual violence in this respect, that presents an aporia much more paradigmatically scandalous than the assumed inter-familial taboo of incest. Without the specter of incest Great Gram, Gram, Mama and Ursa would continue to bear the surname Corregidora. The Corregidor curse, which Ursa cannot think or act her way out of, is not an exception but is the rule of slavery. The relations of power in this family relationship point to an insidious and captivating condition of sexual violence revelatory in the process of naming but of far greater reach than that of a name. As Roberts asserts, "naming a slave after his owner reinforces the slave's lack of a separate

identity apart from his master."[43] This naming is always already sexual and is inherently predicated on violation of the right to possess a narrative of existence outside of that produced by the will of others. The sexual violation of the slave is not an act done onto the slave but a permanent state of access that determines one's status as property at the level of ontological relations. The constitution of Black gender is always already in a state of sexual openness. The raw exposure is what authorizes the avenues of access demarcating the inability of Blackness to resist and present as otherwise closed to impeding desires.

Sexual violence as a marking of flesh convolutes the demarcations of Black gender, however because "they burned all the slavery papers so it would be like they never had it,"[44] it becomes almost paradoxical to determine what constitutes Blackness as a gendered object. Whatever future is born of Blackness is forever marked by the constraints of the failed ability to say just how "they" in fact "had it." Had "what" is the question and "who"? By engulfing Blackness with sex, those not marked in the world by slavery were granted the power to exercise a condition of totalizing violence. However, the fact of this violence is evident only in fragments of Blackness, the story is never whole. It is in fact a conceptual aphasia. What is heard and what is silenced highlights the relations of power at play in determining the story of Blackness that repeats incessantly. What emerges in this representation is the subjectivity of others up against the gender and sexualized violences rendered against property.

The (Dis)Appearances of Sexual Violence

> Respondent alleges that about the time he was discharged by the [plaintiffs], the [plaintiffs] with the malicious intent and purpose of injuring him and destroying his reputation as an

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[43] Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 38.
[44] Ibid., 9; emphasis added.

> Overseer, did falsely assert and cause to be circulated throughout his Parish and elsewhere, divers false and slanderous reports to wit: That respondents had treated their negroes with cruelty and inhumanity — that he had cut and mutilated them and had caused the death of one of them, by which false and slanderous reports, so uttered and circulated by the plaintiffs, this Respondent has suffered damages to the amount of Six Thousand dollars which amount he demands in convention & prays Judgement in Solido against them for the Said Sum with five per cent interest from the rendition thereof until paid. Respondent prays that the demands of the plaintiffs be reflected at their cost & for general relief. – *Humphreys v. Utz*

The record of slavery is always fragment and displaced. It is everywhere and nowhere simultaneously, conveying meaning as its significances are denied. Yet the assumption that the slave record willingly and clearly reveals itself pervades modern understandings of slavery, presenting it in logic as a mere institution rather than a productive logic of being. Such positions conclude to know all of the potential ebbs and flows of just what slavery could mean to the modern world. Judith Schafer, as a legal scholar, displays this analysis of slavery in the assertions she privileges in regards to the Louisiana Supreme Court case, *Humphreys v. Utz* (*Utz*). What stands before us is a case that announces itself as mediating particular concerns regarding slander and employment discrimination, but instead brings forth several contradictions about Blackness, gender, and sexual violence and the silences that pervade the coming together of these terms. The record of this case was essentially lost, as it was never entered into any legal indexes. Judith Schafer happened upon the handwritten transcripts of the case "in one of several boxes that had been left in the vault of the supreme court

when the court's antebellum records were transferred"[45] to the University of New Orleans. Though *Utz* was lost in the material legal record, the violence that authorized the case is not lost. Schafer describes the case as, "provid[ing] compelling proof that the Supreme Court of Louisiana had an unspoken policy of under reporting or omitting entirely from its reports cases involving cruelty of a sexual nature to slaves."[46] While it may be that the state of Louisiana intentionally omitted cases pertaining to sexual violence against slaves, such a claim seems far exaggerated considering most, if not all and I am inclined to say all instances of slavery involved some form of sexual offense. Perhaps this fact is not as evident in the historical proceedings that are found in the state legal indexes, as the sexual violence emerges both pervasively and silently in its utterances. As such, the form and function of slavery, as a structural logic, cannot be disarticulated from sexual violence nor was any individual slave free from this calculus.

The assumptive tone Schafer provides in her introductory notes to the revived transcript of the *Utz* case, suggests that something has gone awry in the fact that the case has seemingly vanished in the legal record until she *finds* it and republishes it. Stating, "*Utz* provides rare documentary evidence, evidence considered too horrible to be published, of the savory that could result when the law allowed some members of society to treat other human being as property."[47]What Schafer's analysis misinterprets is the manner in which *Utz* has been forgotten and also not forgotten. The assumption Schafer makes in prefacing the case before presenting it, does not take seriously the reality of what the case itself actually finds. As the transcript states, "Witness has often see deft whip the Boy Bob or Ginger Pop, he died about three o'clock in the evening and he was buried at seven

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[45] Judith K. Schafer, "Sexual Cruelty to Slaves: The Unreported Case of *Humphreys v. Utz*," *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 68, no3 (1993): 1313.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid, 1314.

next morning, there we no other white persons on the place except deft and witness."[48] The concern by Schafer is also present in the law itself, which suggests that witnessing and remembering only happens by way of the official record. The law has no obligation to the slave to remember or acknowledge its place within it. The lack of obligation and the refusal to convict, at the center of the "discovery" of *Utz*, are still ever present. These anti-Black realities have not wavered in their form. How do we begin to make sense of sexual violence under slavery as it is inflicted upon slave women, men, and children demonstrating no bounds in its gratuitous application and grisly force? What then can gender mean to Blackness as it bears the continual weight of the paradigmatic social and political structuring slavery?

In the final pages of the *Utz* legal transcript, the following equation is found:

1 January 10 19 Aug (incl.) 7 mon. & 19 days

12/$800.00 - per annum

66.66- per month

x7

466.62

33.33

6.66

2.22

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$508.83 — wages to 19th Aug inclusive

$388.86 — verdict of the jury [in] favor [of] deft

$120. — amt. deducted from wages by the jury

[48] Ibid., 1319.

These figures represent the amount the court determined Henry Utz, the defendant in the case an overseer, was entitled to receive from his former employers, brother John C. Humphreys and George W. Humphreys, for working on their plantation and carrying out the duties of his job. Utz killed Ginger Pop, a slave, also known as Bob, who continued to runaway from the Humphreys' plantation. The court determined Ginger Pop simply died. Ginger Pop was repeatedly sexually mutilated by Utz until his death, yet such details were deemed insignificant to the concerns of the court. The plaintiffs petition also holds that "Utz inflicted a similar outrage upon a certain negroe boy named Dave or David also the property of your petitioners and under the control or management of said Utz as overseer on the Buckland Plantation."[49] Beyond this statement nothing further is mentioned of the slave identified as Dave or David. Utz having previously been acquitted of any criminal wrongdoing, appealed in prayer to the high court of the State of Louisiana to uphold the lower court's decision and find that he in fact did not cause any monetary loss to the Humphreys', the plaintiffs. Utz contented he carried out the stipulations of his employment dutifully. He rested on faith that court would act upon a divine truth. The courts heeded his prayer finding that his termination was wrongful and awarded him the above sum of back wages with interest, minus a slight jury deduction.

Utz is a heinous case, there is no other way to describe it. Page after page, we are presented with continual and gratuitous pronouncements of sexual violence and torture. The case is representative of how the subjection of Blackness appears in the political arena at the behest of the desire and motive will of others. Blackness becomes consumed into the legal concerns of others, i.e. was this a wrongful or legitimate termination of Henry Utz, which produces the off perception that the arising subjectivities from these concerns can also be considered possessive qualities of the slave.

[49] Ibid., 1316.

The sexual violence at the heart of this trial, the acts of sexual mutilation used against Ginger Pop go undiscussed and unattended to. The judgement rendered by Judge Alonzo Snyder of the Tenth Judicial District Court of Louisiana states, "By reason of the law and the evidence in this case being in favor of the defendant and by further reason of the verdict of the jury it is ordered that the defendant have judgement against the plaintiff in Solido in the same Three Hundred and Eighty Eight dollars and Eight Six cents, and that the said plaintiff pay the cost of this suit."[50] I argue this ruling is granted as a symbolic of the power of the violent preservation of white social life. It maintains his freedom from the accusation that harm could be ever committed towards a slave, no matter how egregious his behavior. This designation of innocence is not simply nor primarily about the political life of Utz as a worker. It reflects more broadly the status of his subjectivity against the object status of Ginger Pop. Every action performed by Utz is determined as justified making Ginger Pop the culpable agent. The most pressing concern here is not that Ginger Pop died in a general sense but that the manner of death was inflicted through the use of sexual of torture as preferred method of controlling slaves by Utz.

The commandeering of sex to uphold enslavement is situated within the emergence of the Transatlantic slave trade. The convention of what makes the slave of modernity is that of sexual violence in the first instance of the encounter. As Jennifer Morgan illustrates by way of the descriptive gestures of European travel logs from Africa, which noted in great detail the unclothed breast and genitals of African women, "thereby making women's sexual availability the defining metaphor of colonial accessibility and black African savagery."[51] This assertion of power over the body of African women inscribed into slavery a locus of power centered on the sexual availability of

[50] Ibid., 1327.
[51] Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 29.

the slave in all capacity to the will of the master. Morgan argues, to which I also contend, that "the process by which 'Africans' became 'black' who became 'slaves' was initiated — on the European side at least — through a series of encounters made manifest in literary descriptions and only later expanded by the quotidian dimensions of slave ownership and settlement."[52] In a similar sense, the law participates, though is not the sole site, in the making of Blackness. Its repetition highlights Human life against that of the Black, while affirming and proliferating the silences that tend to the nature of the ills that inflect Blackness. The law provides no recourse to thought about acts of sexual violence imposed upon captive. These silence highlight a status upon which the slave in all its capacities is free for gratuitous imposition. Yet legal proceedings like *Utz* demonstrate how the engendering of Blackness by particular means of violence is set aside, milled over, and used to offer visibility to claims of existence that are structured in totality by antiblackness.

The appellant's brief in Utz provides a terse and grueling summary to the several pages of witness statements, and judicial comments, highlighting repeatedly the gratuitous violence inflicted upon Ginger Pop. "That one of said slaves, whose name was 'Ginger Pop,' died from the effect of cruelties inflicted upon him by the defendant, in nailing the privates of said negro to the bedstead, and then inflicting blows upon him until said negro pulled loose from the post to which he had been pinned, by driving an iron tack or nail through his penis or privates."[53] Then again referencing in favor of the plaintiff stating, "the testimony of Joseph Rimmer, proves 'that the defendant acknowledged to him that drove a nail or tack through the privates of the negro 'Bob or Ginger Pop,' and whipped him until he broke loose."[54] Yet these details are passed over and seen as circumstantial, unproven, and unwitnessed. The judgement, by way of the jury, granted in favor of

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[52] Ibid., 13.
[53] Schafer, "Sexual Cruelty to Slaves," 1332.
[54] Ibid.

the defendant was supported by "the only testimony of the defense relied upon, is the witness Gabriel Utz, a brother of the defendant Henry Utz."[55] His testimony held the plaintiffs' claims were "unworthy of credence," yet Gabriel Utz was not present the day the incidents occurred only the days proceeding. Every witnesses statement for the plaintiffs and the defendant rested on what was heard by way of another, hearsay. The court determined Joseph Reimer witness for the plaintiff and Henry Utz were the only witness present, as "there were no other white persons on the place," find that all present slaves could not provide witness to the events that occurred. This lack of recognition of the position of Blackness with respect to injury, is emblematic of a structured aphasia that is demonstrated by the courts but not contained there. The aphasia emerges with respect to colliding of a grammar of suffering for the Black.

While the appellant's brief conceded that Utz "had literally *worn out* a poor, helpless negro; he had robbed of life, by his merciless cruelties," it cites "a prejudiced jury failed to do," as in uphold the tenets of the law and find Utz at fault for the death of Ginger Pop.[56] Even in the appellant attorney's moral and legal righteousness to appeal to the laurels of humanity and God something is amiss. This cry does not change the essential facts in the case. He writes,

> shall is be said that our laws which protects even a dog from the brutal violence of his master, shall not through the aegis of its protection around a human being, — one who although a slave is made after the image of God and stamped with the dignity of soul and intellect which exalts human nature above the level of other created beings.[57]

First, the jury verdict was rendered with respect to a social arraignment of power that saw fit that Utz, or no white person for that matter, should have to bear the stain of an accusation upon their

[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid., 1335.
[57] Ibid.

character that they could commit any harm to any slave. Recalling the previously quoted appeal by Utz to the court to spare him of the plaintiffs' "purpose of injuring him and destroying his reputation as an Overseer" by simply asserting that he'd partaken in any possible wrong doing towards a slave. Again, this claim was not made as an appeal to the political associations of the job but to the social order of slavery that protects whites in all facets of life, at the constitution of their being from subordination to Black claims to life, not just at the level of employment. The violence of social life prevailed over the legal mandate of slavery as a political institution set forth by codes and laws. The force of this subjective obligation to uphold freedom of movement and possession of being is situated against the imminent death of slaves and subsequent silencing of a grammar of suffering that is solely available to slaveness. The trial proceeds with no mention to what meaning could or should be ascribe to the sexual torture Ginger Pop endured. His sexual violation appears in the discourse of Utz's coming into being as a legal, political, and social subject as an analog that grants credence to the life claims wagered by Utz. Utz is granted freedom and movement within subject categories through the deadening silence of any mediation on what it meant for Ginger Pop to suffer sexual violation as a result of his attempts to access freedom by any means necessary.

What continues to exist from and through *Utz* are the dynamics of power at the heart of the case with respect to the silence that pervades sexual violence as a mechanism of violence qua violence. Apart of that violence is the insistence on asserting that slaves, and the slave record, have the ability to stand before the law just as any others. As such vouching for the slaves right to life is assumed to bring forth some credence to the violence endured. The sexually violent toils of slavery did not emerge subjectivities with respect to Blackness that could authorize a grammar of suffering to apprehend the magnitude of structural weight of this paradigm of engendering slaves.

Ursa and Mutt Together, Eternally

There was a woman over on the next plantation. The master shipped her husband out of bed with her and just as soon as he was getting ready to go in her she cut off his thing with a razor she had hid under the pillow and he bled to death, and then the next day they came and got her and her husband. They cut off her husband's penis and stuffed it in her mouth, and then they hanged her. They let him bleed to death. They made her watch and then they hanged her.

– Gayl Jones, *Corregidora*

The above scene is not an anomalous event. Its repetition can be seen and heard throughout the slave archive endlessly. Female and male slaves drawn together in likeness not by claims to romantic love but through the intimacy of violence their bodies were subjected to. The symbiosis of sexual violence endured by slaves speaks to a particular form of peculiarity at the heart of "the peculiar institution" itself. Sex, mutilation, and bondage are situated centrally to its terroristic structural pairing with Blackness. The response to the attempt of the slave to announce themselves as other to this regime of power was continually met with outright heinous sexual attacks. Sexual violence denied the slave the right to claim Human terms of existence, whether it be marriage, gender difference, or fugitive status, death and/or mutilation by way of sexual terms was enacted to deny the Black the right to inhabit these categories wholly by inaugurating a cartography that can name Blackness outside of the bounds of Human life.

Saidiya Hartman illustrates this using the legal entanglement of slaves standing before the law when the associations of human categories, such as the status of marriage, are wrought by totalizing violence. The engagement by Hartman with the dual invocation of violence that is writ onto the Black female body, suggest that the overdetermination of Blackness produces a condition of being that is unable to definitely mark its relations to any particular mode of existence. Through violence, Blackness is made to inhabit everything and nothing, leaving it overexposed and absent simultaneously. As Hartman argues in relation to the disavowal of sexual violence against female

slaves by the law, "The confusion between consent and coercion, feeling and submission, intimacy and domination, and violence constitutes the what I term the discourse of seduction in slave law. The discourse of seduction obfuscates the primacy and extremity of violence in master-slave relations and in the construction of the slave as both property and person."[58] I would argue that the concern Hartman expresses with the production of slave law is representative of the relationship between Blackness and articulation as a law of being in a much broader sense. In the case of slave rape, discourses of suffering that attempt to apprehend the situation of Black women at the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality bury the edifices of violence rather than illuminate them.

In the case of *Alfred v. State*, where Alfred, a slave man is charged with the murder of his overseer, Coleman, who raped Charlotte Alfred's wife, Hartman demonstrates how, as Wynter argues, "the black population group–men, women, and children–must function as negation."[59] Hartman explains, "Although the defense attempted to introduce Charlotte as a witness and thereby provide that Alfred's action was motivated by the rape of his wife, the district attorney objected to Charlotte's testimony. The court sustained the objection; the prisoner was convicted and sentenced to death by hanging."[60] The denial of the ability of Charlotte to be sexually violated provides the frame from which Alfred is subsequently denied the ability to bring recourse to the violation, because there was no law in place to recognize Charlotte and Alfred as having an authorized relation to one another, outside of the will of the master. Furthermore, Charlotte's inability to bear witness to the violence inflicted upon her, which is her ability to say no in the first instance and to mark it as a violation in the second instance, then justifies Alfred's death. What constitutes Charlotte and

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[58] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 81.
[59] Sylvia Wynter, "Proud Flesh Inter/views: Sylvia Wynter." *Proud Flesh: New Afrikan Journal of Culture, Politics & Consciousness* no. 4 (2006): 25.
[60] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 84.

Alfred is the complete inability to possess the right of articulating themselves as multiply situated beings. What the details of the case reveal is Charlotte and Alfred position as slaves rendered them equally unable to act in excess to the will and desire of the slave estate, and this position is reinforced solely through violence.

The inability of the female slave to reject the totalizing inscription of sex onto the body produces a system upon which the suffering of all slaves is silenced. As Hartman argues "sexuality is a central dimension of the power exercised over and against the slave population and entails everything from compulsory couplings to the right to manage life."[61] Through the violence of sexuality Charlotte and Alfred are merged together as slaves. In death, the court valorizes Coleman's right to life through the negation of the right of being for both, Charlotte and Alfred. Coleman is determined as not solely deserving of physical life, but symbolic life that is encapsulated in his ability to be and do everything the slave system has deemed Charlotte and Alfred as devoid of possessing. As such, the negation of Charlotte as having the right to possess sexual agency, the negation of Charlotte and Alfred's right to a union, the negation of the ability of Alfred to act in response to Charlotte's sexual violation, and Alfred's right to life all function to project abundant life onto Coleman. As such Coleman is rendered as deserving life, constituted by his absolute right to possess sexuality autonomously thus allow him to be intelligible within every condition that Charlotte and Alfred are absent within. Furthermore, by the denial of the court of Charlotte and Alfred's right of access to these modes of being is not where the violence that structures them lies. Even in the assertive attempt to place slaves into the discourse of gender and sexuality, as deserving of life like Coleman, again reveals another violent layer of structuring for which the slave still cannot emerge within, because the category of individual association is denied through violence. The condition of

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[61] Ibid.

violence that engender slaves with gender demonstrate the saturation of negrophobic and negrophilic impulses at the level of being. Slaves, and by extension Blackness, are made to represent every mode of being all at once, and in doing so the constitution of Black being in gender distinction is buried by competing discursive renderings.

As Foucault sets up his initial theorizations of biopower in *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction (Volume I)*, he argues "… institutions of power, ensured the maintenance of production relations, the rudiments of anatomo- and bio-politics, created in the eighteenth century as techniques of power present at every level of the social body and utilized by very diverse institutions…. Operated in the sphere of economic process, their development, and the forces working to sustain them."[62] The production of individuality is fashioned by a biopolitical order and tied to employing the power of the social body toward economic ends. Arguing the relationship of the biopolitical and economic further, Foucault writes, "The adjustment of the accumulation of men to that of capital, the joining of the growth of human groups to the expansion of productive forces and the differential allocation of profit, were made possible in part by the exercises of bio-power in its many forms and modes of applications."[63] Biopower is an economic, political, and social regulation however social productions always refer back to economic and political ends. Contrarily in the case of Blackness, as Hartman has convincingly argued, the Black is regulated by "the social qua social" and is not necessitated by any political or economic rationalizations. How then do we come to apprehend the relationship of Blackness to the world of biopower?

The individual plays a central role in deputizing its relationship to the political processes of biopower. The relationship between Blackness and individuality however is a precarious one because its natal condition is one of permanence that is produced paradigmatically. As Foucault locates the

[62] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction Volume I* (New York, 1978), 141.
[63] Ibid.

instantiation of biopower within the realm of sexuality, an impossibility of logic is made visible when theorizing Blackness through these claims. Biopower is concerned with "sex as a political issue."[64]Arguing that, "Sex was a means of access both to the life of the body and the life of the species."[65] Black sex, the reproduction of Blackness under the regime of slavery, bore not life but natal captivity. As Sexton argues through the work of Hartman,

> …it is the legal and political status of the captive female that is paradigmatic for the "(re)production of enslavement," in which "the normativity of sexual violence [i.e., the virtual absence of prohibitions or limitations in the determination of socially tolerable and necessary violence] establishes an inextricable link between racial formation and sexual subjection."[66] This is why for Hartman resistance is figured through the black female's sexual self-defense, as exemplified by the 1855 circuit court case State of Missouri v. Celia, a Slave, in which the defendant was sentenced to death by hanging on the charge of murder for responding with deadly force to the sexual assault and attempted rape by a white male slaveholder.[67]

The impossibility of Celia to possess the right of her sexual being to reject or even to authorize the meaning of her sexual reproduction marks a particular terror inherent to slavery. The meaning of her sexuality is marked by terror, as she unwilling reproduces the conditions of her captive existence. The meaning of her sexuality, her existence within the world, is defined by a power that she does not control. Black sex is thus heavily guarded, not just in the context of slavery but also in the context of its afterlife, as the space that is called on to mark the continual captivity of Blackness. It is the

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[64] Ibid., 145.
[65] Ibid., 146.
[66] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 85.
[67] Jared C. Sexton, "People-of-Color-Blindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery," *Social Text* 28, no. 2 (2010): 33.

"fashioned obligations" of sexual freedom that hold Blackness captive to the impossibility of an individual sexual order.[68] As Hartman argues the "fashioned obligations" of individuality for the emancipated slave was not simply unrealized but was of an impossibility because of the structure of the Black condition, one born into a collective relationship to a particular violence.

Ursa's marriage to Tadpole, the owner of Happy's Cafe where she works as a blues singer, is born out of the above section epigraph. Following the above detailed epigraph of the gruesome scene of mutilation and collective death of a female and male slave, whose claim to life though marriage was met by the force witnessing of each other's demise by way of sexual violence, the union of Ursa and Tadpole emerges. It seems impossible to think their coming together outside of the terms of a forced coalescing under condition of inescapable violence. After fleeing Cat's house, Ursa moves in with Tadpole in a residence just about Happy's Cafe, where the almost immediately begin a sexual relationship. The "genital fantasies," as Ursa terms it, of white enslavers lived longer than their mortal lives. Ursa spent her life and thoughts trying to separate herself from these fantasies, trying to other herself through her incessant desire to bear generations, only to realize during her time living with Tadpole that she too bore the same stain of slavery. Reminiscing on her time with Mutt when she first *saw* herself in a picture he'd shown her, Ursa states, "I realized for the first time I had what all those women had. I'd always thought I was different. *Their* daughter, but somehow different. Maybe less Corregidora. I don't know. But when I saw that picture, I knew I had it."[69] Thinking more about the sameness in her difference, Ursa goes on to say, "But I *am* different now, I was thinking. I have everything they had, except generations. I can't make generations. And if I still had my womb, even if the first baby *had* come — what would I have done

[68] In *Scenes of Subjection* Hartman explains "fashioned obligation" as a burden individuality indebted onto the newly freed slave. Hartman argues however the fashioned obligations of individualism could never be formally realized for Blacks.
[69] Jones, *Corregidora*, 60.

then? Would I have kept it up? Would I have been like *her*, or *them*?"[70] In this moment, she recalls a conversation with her mother where she asked if her foremothers had other children to which her mother responds, "'I think there was some boys. I think they told me there was some boys, but Corregidora sold the boys off.'"[71] Ursa's inquisitive "Why?" was met with a scold from her mother that she'd not asked and Ursa dare never ask as well. Tadpole then wakes Ursa, this had all been a dream, to him she was having a nightmare.

Yet, during her marriages Ursa never shared the story of her family and her coming to being with either Mutt or Tadpole. Stating, "I never told [Mutt]. I gave him only pieces. A few more pieces than I'd given Tadpole, but still pieces."[72] Though not knowing this history both men treat Ursa as a sexual object, as her genitals, just as she explained the fantasy of the enslavers onto her foremothers, "They knew you only by the signs of your sex."[73] Ursa marked by sex even through the silences of her history. Somehow the sexual stain followed her, with or without speaking, with or without generations. Though the impetus for this sexualization of the Black feminized body is found clearly in slavery, mediations and descriptions of what it means now and the function of violently produced sexuality is marked by silence. Cat, recounts to Ursa a moment where she was nearly raped by a white employer after saying to her, "'You pretty Catherine, you know that? You pretty, Catherine. A lot of you nigger women is pretty.'"[74] This story brings out from Cat's own trepidation about marriage, after Tadpole arranges for her to witness their nuptials. Cat attempts to tell Ursa her story, premising it with, "'I didn't wont to be a fool in front of them and then come home and be a fool with him too. Couldn't even get in my own bed and not be a fool and have him make me feel like a

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[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid., 61.
[72] Ibid., 60.
[73] Ibid., 59
[74] Ibid., 65.

fool too.'"[75] Them being her white employers, the husband who attempts to rape her and his wife who turns a blind eye to Cat's sexual victimization by her husband. Him, being Cat's ex-husband, to which she could not stay married to and endure his sexual abuse after coming home from a sexually terrorizing work environment. Cat attempts to connect to Ursa with this story but Ursa denies her the embrace she hopes for. Ursa instead urges Cat to get over her hysteria in a way she has not been able to rid herself of her own. The insistence that the hysteria can be "gotten over" seems disingenuous of Ursa to suggest but perhaps she believes there is a release from the torment so she proceeds to marry Tadpole.

Tadpole cheats on Ursa prompting her to leave him and take up residence singing in another bar, The Spider. There she is greeted with the unwanted sexual advances of men it is a stain she cannot shake, no matter where she finds herself in the world. During this time, she sinks deeper into her thoughts about the legacy of Corregidora and her conversations with her mother. "I never saw my mama with a man, never saw her with a man. But she wasn't a virgin because of me. And still she was heave with virginity."[76] This reference to her mothers' nascent sexuality, unbirth yet amorphous waning the desires of the use value of others demands, speaks to the position Ursa has found herself in. She had been penetrated without feeling time and time again. "He was inside, and I felt nothing. I wanted to feel but I couldn't."[77] For Ursa, Mama, Gram, Great Gram there was no life to their sex although the details that provided clarity for what stole existence from Gram and Great Gram, slavery and sexual bondage, the facts for Mama and Ursa were much more formless. "Corregidora was easier than what she wouldn't tell me."[78] Her thoughts about her foremothers, their existence and her own continue to oscillate between hysterical renderings of what they'd

[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid., 101.
[77] Ibid., 82.
[78] Ibid., 102.

endured and Mutt. Ursa is drawn back to Mutt. Why she is unsure. She cannot make sense of the present because her story is incomplete. She is being denied information by her mother, not of the distant past but of the recent past, her and her mother's present moment. Asking, "how could she bear witness to what she'd never lived, and refuse me the what she had lived."[79] Ursa is prompted to catch as bus to ask her mother the questions her sanity is yearning to bring rational solace upon.

She finds nothing. Her mother shares the story of her father. Their meeting, their life together, and his departure. However, the cause of his departure, like all other aspect of Ursa's life was a complicated story. Just like Ursa mama narrates sex as a single directional encounter, "… still that memory, feeling of him in me. I wouldn't let myself feel anything."[80] Year after his departure Mama confronts him and is met with anger, rage. Upon contemplation of his reaction to the sight of her which incited him to yell "get out" and multiple obscenities her way, '"go on down the street, looking like a whore. I wont you to go on down the street, looking like a whore,"'[81] mama internalizes his rage. His words turned physical as mama explains, "I only went back to him once. He was staying at this boarding house, Ursa. All he did was start beating on me. He started beating on me," adding, "like he was going to go for my cunt."[82] She concludes that this is her fault, that his violence and rage was all her doing stating, "I carried him to the point where he ended up hating me, Ursa. And that's what I knew I'd keep doing. That's what I knew I'd do to any man."[83]

It seems a similar, if not the same, internalization of a self-recognition rooted in sexual openness and repulsion 22 years after the push-fall, drew Ursa back to Mutt. They reunite, I argue, not on romantic terms as lovers but on a theoretical coming together at the level of their mutual

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[79] Ibid., 103.
[80] Ibid., 118
[81] Ibid., 121.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.

non-existence by way of slavery. The point here is not look past the use of brute force and fashioned masculinity employed by Mutt which inflicted bodily and mental harm onto Ursa but to think the hysteria of her inability to bear generations with Mutt as an impossibility bestow upon them before that fateful night. This final point also does not suggest nor excuse reading Mutt and his violence from being held accountable to a larger political Black feminist narrative pertaining to the quotidian nature of everyday violence against Black women. There is nothing to idealize here, in marking these two as bound by a condition beyond their individual actions but instead to invoke a structure of violence that is at the heart of *Utz, Alfred v. State, Missouri v. Celia*, and also at play in the misrecognition and recasting of Sojourner Truth in space and time. Ursa is drawn to Mutt because there is a deep reason, a paradigmatic necessity as to why they cannot coexist. The property relation of slavery that situates the Black as object, placed claim on the sexual capacities of Black feminized gender that reverberate through violence. The status of gender willed by sexual violence imbues the claim of freedom with the hysterical longing present in Ursa's desire to make generations. To make generations means to bring forth life that is free from a condition of gratuitous violence. Such necessitates producing heirs who have access to the preconditions of gender arraignments and subjectivity bestowed by a recognized kinship structure, "our father's children," as oppose to the "mama's babies and papa's maybes."[84] It would mean transgressing the limits of the mother law into the symbolic situations of the father law of non-slave existence. Neither Ursa nor Mutt, pre the push-fall nor prior to that event, have the capacity to circumvent a paradigm set forth by the auspices of the peculiar institution.

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[84] One does not have to agree to the terms of this normative gender arraignment nor perform its stylized markings. Instead the point is about being positioned in the world by an imparting of filial capacity bestowed onto subjects situated outside of Blackness. Parenting, as a lived experience, can be performed in various ways in excess to this notion.

The blues is Black and gendered, the blues is engendered Black. Mutt is not free from the blues of sexual violation. He has a story and what he knows of it he tells. Prior to getting married to Mutt, Ursa shared the story of Corregidora and her foremothers with him. He in response shared that,

> his great-grandfather – he guessed great-grandfather – had worked as a blacksmith, hiring hisself out, and bought his freedom, and then he had bought his wife's freedom. But then he got in debt to these men, and he didn't have any money, so they come and took his wife. The courts judged that it was legal, because even if she was his wife, and fulfilled the duties of wife, he had bought her, and so she was also his property, his slave.[85]

The precarious of nature of kinship pervades Mutt's position in the world. It pervades the existence of Blackness as the desire to bear generations free from the external grasp is haunting. This capture on life asserts its presence even as the response "say nothing" to such egregious acts of violence, capture, and reduction of the body to sexualized flesh. The rupture is there overbearing to the desire to will it away.

In the end, Ursa and Mutt come together. Her blues performance is where Mutt finds her. He reconnects by reminding Ursa of his great-grandfather, gesturing to suggest his loss of Ursa gave him the same feeling his great-grandfather had when he lost his wife. "After they took her, when he went crazy he wouldn't eat nothing by onions and peppermint…I tired but it didn't do nothing but make me sick."[86] Mutt however had the option to return so he did. The thoughts that lead Ursa to this accept a physical reconnection with Mutt are revelatory and haunting. Ursa wants to know what drew Corregidora into this perverse generational narrative:

[85] Jones, *Corregidora*, 151.
[86] Ibid., 183-4.

> It had to be sexual, I was thinking, it had to be something sexual that Great Gram did to Corregidora. I knew it had to be sexual: 'What is it a woman can do to a man that make him hate her so bad he wont to kill her one minute and keep thinking about her and can't get her out of his mind the next?' In a split second I knew what it was, and I think he might have known too. A moment of pleasure and excruciating pain at the same time, a moment of broken skin but not sexlessness, a moment just before sexlessness, a moment that stops just before sexlessness, a moment that stops before it breaks the skin: 'I can kill you.'[87]

With these thoughts of sex riddled with death, or more aptly social death, Ursa begins removing the value judgements from the violences inscribed on her life. Finding that what Corregidora had done, Mutt, Mama, and Daddy were not worse than one another. Subtracting the value does not remove the pain of the injuries but levels them as equitable within an equation of violence rooted in the sexual violation of Black women's bodies that inflexed devaluation on Black gendered bodies, en masse.

Ursa and Mutt embrace following the repetitions of the words "I don't want a kind of woman that hurts you," to which Ursa responds "Then you don't want me." Mutt shakes Ursa until she falls crying. She relays that, "I don't want a kind of man that'll hurt me neither."[88] The embrace occurs in this moment, where it feels good to avow a disavow in moving forward that such could not be true. They are hurting one another in the truth of speech and the context of the embrace. Blackness will always be hurt. It is hurt. It is (en)gendered that way.

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[87] Ibid., 184.
[88] Ibid., 185.

Conclusion: Ruminations on *Assata*

In May of 2013, the FBI increased its bounty, to two million dollars, for the capture and return of Assata Shakur from Cuba to the United States. Much has changed and stayed the same since 1979, when Assata was liberated from prison after being sentenced to life plus 33 years. In 1984, she was granted political asylum in Cuba, coincidentally this was the same year of my birth. Nearly 34 years after her liberation and 29 years after the authorization of her permanent stay in Cuba, she was labeled as the most wanted terrorist by a Black Attorney General under the administration of the first Black president of the United States. The FBI's Counterintelligence Program (CointelPro) now breathing life into the Patriot Act and the United States waged global war on terror. The vengeances are clear as the United States vows to bring Assata to heel. Yet so much has changed but things stay the same. The repressive movement against Black liberation morphed into the pinnacle of contemporary global social control. Yet unless you search for it or know it is there, the Black at the center of the global phobic relation to terror is fleeting. Assata epitomizes the connection. The bounty still looming in 2016, the wanted pictures frozen in time with images nearly half a century decayed. The world has turned but the paradigm has not shifted.

Why offer Assata in conclusion? Assata politically presents a focus on the disorientation of the world in Black terms. Her situation within the merger of violence and flight crystalizes the impossibility of conclusive renderings. In fact what I have been tasked to demonstrate in the preceding chapters is exactly why closure is Black*femme*phobic.[1] To assume finality to the reverberations of life that breed from property as a dispossessed sexual object would foreclose upon the continual political implications that unfold from these histories. My intent here has been to demonstrate that the ramifications of the historical record critically destabilizes singularity in thought, imagination, and politics, in reference to what is to be done about slavery. The history of

[1] The reference to Black*femme*phobia is drawn from T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting.

sexual violence makes clear that the tendrils of its reach stretch into various realms. The imaginary, legal, and political have been explored in-depth here however even these focuses show that the implication of sexual violence cannot be encapsulated within these terms.

Thus Assata, lends the world an autobiography that in its use of preconscious identifications to account for structural arrangements of violence, produce an aporia for thought. The conceptualization of "objective vertigo," by Frank B. Wilderson, III, places this aporia clearly into view. Wilderson argues,

> Subjective vertigo is vertigo of the event. But the sensation that one is not simply spinning in an otherwise stable environment, that one's environment is perpetually unhinged stems from a relationship to violence that cannot be analogized. This is called objective vertigo, a life constituted by disorientation rather than a life interrupted by disorientation. This is structural as opposed to performative violence. Black subjectivity is a crossroads where vertigoes meet, the intersection of performative and structural violence.[2]

Assata as a self-identified insurgent Black woman is confounded by the weight of a performative existence and a structural imposition. As a member of the Black Liberation Army (BLA), the legacy of Assata and her comrades politically shifted the discursive engagements with Blackness globally. However, as the technologies of violence used to orient Black life changed as a result of their political labors, the structure of naming remained the same. I say this not to assert fault or to impart shortcomings on their actions, where there are none. Instead it is to mark the distillation of power that places Blackness within the hold. The paradigmatically conditioned aphasia of what is to be done to redress the sexually violated slave has yet to be spoken. Structurally the dead have not been granted their right to vengeance.

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[2] Frank B. Wilderson, III, "The Vengeance of Vertigo: Aphasia and Abjection in the Political Trials of Black Insurgents," *InTensions* 5 (2011): 3.

In premising this impossible conclusion, I offer ruminations on *Assata: An Autobiography* to disarticulate the engendering of Black gender from a framework of thought mired to experience as truth. This offering is not a full excavation of the political legacy and life of Assata. Instead it is a focus on particular instances of violence to open the lines of thought on Black gender further, so that such a designation cannot be easily foreclosed.

> In September, i was moved from the workhouse and entombed in the basement of middlesex county jail, allegedly because of the jail's proximity to the middlesex county courthouse where the new jersey trial was scheduled to begin October 1. I was the first, and last, woman ever imprisoned there. It has always been a men's jail.[3]

This is how Assata Shakur describes her arrival at the middlesex county jail for men. There are several issues that arise from the narration of this event, the most obvious being her placement in a facility designated by the state as a space for men, however so defined. Sexual violence pervades the affect one experiences reading this scene, even considering Assata never alludes to that possibility for herself. As the reader we cannot help a painful awareness that sexual violence is lurking in the backdrop. To Assata she appears in this space "allegedly" for the comfort of the state, so that they do not expend too many resources on transporting her, and as such this is where she is placed. The move is justified through the convenience of proximity, which arguably could be seen as a deliberate response to her status as a political prisoner, but to say as much would infer into the text a causal logic that is not there. What is most striking about this scene of engagement is the casual nature in which it unfolds, seemingly lacking any calculation in its manifestation. It is not a pronounced attempt at political repression in fact, as she and the subsequent United Nations human rights

[3] Assata Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography*, (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1987), 65.

violation complaint filed by her attorneys notes,[4] Assata was the only person to ever be housed in this manner.[5] This was not a tactic of prescribed anti- BLA warfare waged by the state, just as it was not an overtly calculated attempt at gendered disciplining. Had either scenarios been the case, some sort of struggle may be apparent to the spectator/the reader, some sign that this was a war between political positions being felt physically by Assata, or perhaps a forceful repositioning of Assata into a gendered arraignment that her political actions defied. In fact, we can chart neither occasion. Her appearance is produced counter to the logics of action and resistance, because what is most striking missing in this scene of engagement is the presence of thought. The Middlesex county jail is near the courthouse and as such she should be there. This is the only thought that resonates behinds the action and we are left with nothing more or nothing less than just this.

The manner in which Assata narrates this scene, attunes to the complete inattention given to her body that emerges at the level of thought, not action. There is no thought given to the question of what is to be done with *her*, as a Black female, as the questions, should she be placed there or can she be placed there, matter little in the grand scheme of things. She was in fact placed there and the outrage heard retrospectively asks just how and under what conditions this could have occurred. In the resonance of this response, attention is focused on the assumed misplacement performed by the action itself, both in the spaces of gender and place. Urging that Assata should have been left in a women's facility is a response lacking political candor. Yet on the contrary urging that Assata should

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[4] Referencing the petition sent to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights by attorney Lennox Hinds, regarding the conditions of confinement of countless Black Panther and BLA members, Assata writes, "They considered my case in the section of their report dealing with solitary confinement: 'One of the worse cases is that of ASSATA SHAKUR, who spent over twenty months in solitary confinement in two separate men's prisons subject to conditions totally unbefitting any prisoner.'" Reference on page 66 of *Assata*

[5] This assertion, by Assata and her attorneys, is cis-gendered as it does not pay credence to the countless transgender, gender non-conforming, and gender queer people who have been incarcerated in facilities that do not match their gender identifications. Though the point is not to support incarceration by any means but to point to what is unaccounted for by the insistence on gendered singularity in this respect.

be freed and not held subject to the repression of the state also is ill suited to deal with the problem at hand. Both responses cannot account for the magnitude of naming at the core of this problematic. Inattention at the level of thought is where Assata is held captive. While important, it is an existence not structurally constituted by her legible status as a political prisoner. The inability to *think* Assata is located in the realm that makes it a dire necessity for the BLA to fight for their status as Black political agents. What draws the BLA together in an alignment with one another and Black people generally is an ontological arraignment that inaugurates Black gender into thought through violence in the first instance.

Perhaps my above reading of *Assata* is incorrect. In fact, I am certain it is. The experiential cannot figure the paradigm. State violence does not figure as the truth of Black repression, its only proxy to the essential violence of this structure. Imagine for once that none of these details matter, not my reading nor the context of Assata's words. Imagine that the primary detail of concern is the fact that Assata is Black. Imagine that as the first instance of her proximity to sexual violence. Can that be imagined? My reading of Assata through the use of the feminine pronounces "she" and "her" asserts a level of bodily integrity that is not there. It places her in a gendered community when in fact theory cannot find a "her" there that is wholly Black. Such a placement forecloses the violent arrangements that bring Assata into conversation with seemingly disparate Black gendered and sexualized concerns. Positioning Assata this way is to tell a story, to muster shock and repulsion, as it minimizes the scope of the problem. I cannot tell the story of Assata as a suffering subject. Her placement in a prison for men is not the context of that suffering. The paradigm that compelled the conditions necessitating the struggle for Black liberation is the story. That line of thought has been structurally barred, sexual violence is its locus. The structure of naming is antiblack leaving Blackness to fight against the desire *to be* so that its violation may even appear as violable on its own terms.

For Assata what bars and crowds out any semblance of mobility for her in the world is her birth name, Joanne Chesimard. JoAnne for her "was bad enough" but the fact that her mother was responsible for that chose slightly counterbalanced its European roots. Chesimard, on the other hand for her marked a riddling of unfathomable violence, as she writes "I would stare up at the ceiling wondering how many black women Chesimard had raped, how many black babies he had fathered, and how many Black people he had been responsible for killing."[6] The reader is left to wallow in the silence of what cannot be known. She quickly moved on asserting, "So the name finally had to go."[7] What was attached to the name bears a weight far greater than the decision to rename oneself. The interconnections of rape, death, and birthing so deeply enshrined in the existence of Blackness, makes naming a structural continuum calling attention to an arraignment of life so all-encompassing it cannot be wished away or thought. The fact that the inner workings of sexual violence and capture do not come to figure as the central elements from which one must think the Black, reveals the flaw in thought itself. Blackness is always of concern. The sheer volume of violent reverberations that figure Blackness, make it the position of the unthought[8] even as it is always the position of concern. As such Blackness is crowded out not simply by the gesture of improper handling. Instead the framings of logic places limits on suffering as a grammatology that orients cartographic maneuvers.

Black gender troubles the threshold of injury and analysis inherent in thought. As Audre Lorde so poignantly posed, "What other creature in the world besides the Black woman has had to build the knowledge of so much hatred into her survival and keep going?"[9] and furthermore, "What

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[6] Shakur, *Assata*, 185.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Saidiya V. Hartman, and Frank B. Wilderson, III., "The Position of the Unthought," *Qui Parle* 13, no. 2 (2003): 183-201.
[9] Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*, (New York: Crossing Press, 2007), 150.

other human being absorbs so much virulent hostility and still functions?"[10] Under what conditions does such an imperative exist? Lorde points to a contradiction of terms. Subjects are permitted the space to pause and mediate on the hatred and hostility they endure. Black gender however is not granted the space of purview for thought. Attempts to grasp Black gendered injury, reveals how the assertion to place attention on such, can only think injury by mediating on logics of suffering not marred to Blackness. Black gender becomes superimposed, forced into other realms of existence, such as discourses of gender, sexuality, and class making it unclear and murky after thought has applied itself what is particularly Black about the arraignment of injury. This propelling of Blackness into the discursive logics of the suffering of subjects born free of slavery, holding Blackness captive theoretically in a matrix of existence and thought that cannot think it as constitutively separate from all other things in the world. Even if Black thought attempts to make such an assertion of singularity, it is drawn back in by a paradigmatic denial that those classified in flesh as subject to gratuitous sexual violence and capture are structurally different than all other beings and things.

The legal designation of rape as a non-offense against enslaved Black women brings to the forefront the impossibility of thinking the scope and presence of Black gendered injury. As Hartman argues the permanence and normativity of sexual violence, not as an experience, but as a paradigmatic comprehension of under what pretenses one can relate to the Black, "establishes an inextricable link between racial formation and sexual subjection."[11] As such sexual violence as an act against Black gendered bodies must be accounted for through a lens that can think Black specific sexual violence, not sexual violence as general condition for all. However, the introspection Hartman performs reveals the impossibility within thought to do such. What emerges is first, the initial violence occurs through inattention that positions the Black gendered body in thought as

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[10] Ibid., 151

[11] Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 85.

available for wanton access so grave and forceful that it disfigures the conception that gendered violence are enacted upon Black bodies. Secondly, the sight of injury only emerges in order to mark the Black culpable of their suffering and to assert that such injuries are not only available for slaves to experience. Thus the attempt at thinking resistance is also crowded out, as what is being resisted resonates solely through a language of violence established precisely upon the exclusion of Blacks.

My use of sexual violence as a theory of engagement has functioned as political allegory. This project has intended to shift engagements with Black gender from notions of the experiential to focus on violence as structural paradigm. It is referential to the experiences of slaves than cannot be incorporated into cartographic measures that render any semblances of recourse to the violence. Black feminist thought lends itself to this purview as its mediations on the life of violence extend beyond that of the premise of political theory proper. While violence indeed sutures the assumptive logic of political theory, with respect to Black gender its mediations privilege metaphysical capacity in spite of violence. That is to say, political theory can only think a subject for whom domination and violence are structured as events of relation rather than as the constitutive permanent element of existence. Present is its guiding imperatives, political theory is undergirded by an incessant belief that all violence has the capacity to be recognized as violence and that all subjects have the capacity to be subjected to the violence equivalently depending on varying political circumstances. As such the subject of political theory moves in and out of violence never resting within it for prolonged periods. What is inherent in this framing is a structural disavowal that the context of freedom as produced within and from violence is hinged upon the permanent captivity of Blackness as a structural category of (non)being. The later point is emergent from a status marked by sexual openness that situates the body of Blackness in all capacities –metaphysical, physical, theoretical— for violent intrusion. The sexualized naming and access to Black women's bodies set the stage for the social and political implications of this violence.

Hortense Spillers mediates on the realm of sex as violence, arguing "it seems that sexual experience among black people (or sex between black and any other) is so boundlessly imagined that it loses meaning and becomes, quite simply, a medium in which the individual is suspended."[12] This state of suspension, I argue is located in the confines of every engagements with Blackness. Black feminisms allow for theory to rest within the unease of this suspension. It is insistent of premising slavery and the violence of its gendered arrangements as the means for apprehending the configurations of existence across time and space. This project has labored to demonstrate how gender and sexuality do not proliferate Blackness seemingly away from a central origin but in fact bring it closer to a singular constitution that is structured in violence. However, the ramification of this relation does not solely reflect upon Blackness. As this project has demonstrated, working through genealogies of Black feminist thought, is that all iterations of difference are destabilized when the vestige of slavery are located within the desire to claim the power of identity against the strictures of objectivity. Gender like all other categories of identity are conceptually foreclosed to Blackness. To bring credence to Blackness through the naming of its essential violence, would be to forge a constitution of presence that is entirely of another world. Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel are insurgencies awaiting this moment to come.

[12] Hortense J. Spillers, "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words," *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003), 164.

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